

Deirdre Stiles

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Rakehell

***Call him rebel or patriot,
rascal or aristocrat,
she knew him only
as a lover!***



THREIPOW

The Red and the Green

It was a fateful year in Irish history—1798—and Napoleon was preparing a huge fleet of ships to invade the southern coast of the Emerald Isle. However, many Irish were not prepared to accept one tyranny in place of another. The country was poised on the brink of civil war. Least affected by the tumult was the aristocratic Wildhearne Lancing, master of the great estate called Lislaughton. Outwardly a fop and a dandy, no one could be sure exactly what he was—or what he stood for. Drawn to him in spite of herself was the beautiful Antonia Desmond, called the “most beautiful woman in Ireland.” Somehow they found love in a land filled with hate.



RAKEHELL

Deirdre Stiles

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A LEISURE BOOK

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—I—

“In spite of everything,” Lady Earle remarked, “he *does* have a leg.”

It was the leg of the born aristocrat. There it was for the ladies—like Lady Charlotte Earle—with eyes to apprehend, and senses to be aroused. The other ladies—listening appreciatively to Lady Earle—perceived for a fact that Wildhearne Lancing *did* indeed have a leg.

Wildhearne was all that the court of Jolly Prince Charlie’s was credited with being, and was not. Under the lights of Lislaughton he buoyantly danced and it cannot be wondered at the effect of it on the ladies.

He had had the education of a prince. Little princes proliferate not only in lands—like England—of abundant riches, but here in Ireland, as well, though the British variety was less of an oddity. However the Irish aristocrat was of a manly as well as a useful nature, and Wildhearne was as useful as any.

“Were I twenty years younger, I think I would marry you,” Lady Earle addressed him, going into dinner, “to cure you of your infatuation.”

“What,” Wildhearne wanted to know, “if it is incurable?”

“Joking aside,” Lady Earle said, “all Ireland is waiting to see your choice of a wife.”

"All Ireland is?"

"Surely you must know that?"

"I doubt if even the Irish know what all Ireland is waiting for."

"Then you ought to find out."

"Perhaps—Lady Earle—you will be the lady to tell me. Certainly," Wildhearne said, "I cannot believe that it is waiting for anything *I* might do."

"You might be wrong."

"The Lancings do not recognize wrong. We're an old family. All the wrongs—whatever they were—are in the distant past. I've had little familiarity with them."

"I wish I might say as much," Lady Earle told him.

Lancings marry money, she might have reminded Wildhearne. The Lancings are not a romantic people. There was a story, Lady Earle had listened to, about a dazzling young widow of the aristocracy. Was it true? she wanted to question Wildhearne.

"A widow?" Wildhearne repeated. "*I*." I, he might have informed Lady Earle, I, who have about me the glory of a racing cutter in full sail on a winning breeze, I, he could have added, who *loved* that precious liberty.

He saw his duties as to his house—the Lancings. His blood and forebears were a foremost thought with him. A widow? The Lancing line demanded more of its descendants than so tame a selection. A widow!

"A garden!" Lady Earle exclaimed. "You have a rich garden, Wildhearne, from which to select the most virginal flower—the lily—the gardenia—the lush orchid or the wild rose."

Wildhearne looked interested.

"The wild rose?" he repeated.

"She isn't here, I mean. She is not among us." They were at Lislaughton, dining. "Is she? Is she?"

"No one," Wildhearne complimented her, "is as quick-witted as you, Lady Earle. So you will have to explain who *she* might be."

"She *will* be Irish. Won't she?"

"Almost everyone one meets is, aren't they?"

"But the Lancings would arise and desert their graves if you brought back to Lislaughton any but a daughter of Erin." Lady Earle gave Wildhearne a speculative look. "What is in your mind, Wildhearne? Would you marry outside the Irish?"

"I don't see myself marrying a Turk. Do *you*, Lady Earle?"

—II—

The ball was turning out to be a gratifying success. A ball is a dance, of course, and usually all the reason there is for one is that there are those—attractive ladies, for the most part—who want to dance and glitter. This ball was held because of the return to Ireland of an Irish hero who had exiled himself in Paris, where the French Revolution mocked the retiring Irish, who talked revolution in their beer, yet bore the English yoke and did nothing more at all about it.

“Why, Charles Carney!”

The Hero of all the Irish—fine and leathery and war-like—noble in his demeanor and decorations—withdrew his eyes from what had filled them for minutes.

Reviewing women exquisitely attired for such inspection—animated and conscious of admiring eyes upon their writhing bodies—was a relief after those monotonous regiments of men, no matter how courageous, who passed before him for inspection and approval.

Ireland was doing her best to present the hero of her blood, an agreeable departure. And his expression conveyed, too, a patriotic satisfaction on discovering that the faces (and the figures) that his eyes lingered upon were of the native isle.

“Charles Carney! Is this what Paris does to you?”

Make you deaf to old and dear friends?"

He had been looking toward where a beauty came whirling toward him upon a young man's arm and was swept away again, like a wave receding.

An aging hero, Charles Carney told himself that it was permissible to stare at the young and to ignore—if he cared to—an old bird like Lady Earle.

"Who is she?" the hero wanted to know.

"Why should I tell you? Why should I address you? Or have you address me? Do you realize you haven't said a word to me this whole night—my old friend?"

"I got here just now myself."

"From Paris?"

"Straight from Paris."

"Dare I believe you?"

"Does an Irishman lie?"

"I've known them to. I've done some lying myself."

"And do you tell it to your confessor?" Charles Carney mocked.

"I tell that one only as much as he already knows."

The young woman Charles Carney had been eyeing in his martial way was visible again to them now. "Who is she?" he repeated. Lady Earle pretended not to know which one he meant. She raised dainty glasses to her eyes.

"Whom," she wanted to know, "do you mean?"

"The beautiful Irish one with the fox-colored hair."

"Fox-colored."

"I can't think of a better description of it."

"They are all Irish and they're nearly all beautiful and most Irish young women have titian hair. Titian hair and blue eyes. Surely," Lady Earle dropped the

gold glasses onto her lap, and turned her eyes to the soldier, "a man of your wide experience must know all about that."

"You know who she is! Titian, you said. Titian hair. Most Irish women don't have such hair. Mostly their hair is no more remarkable or memorable than mine. You know her and you are trying to keep her to yourself."

"Really, Captain Carney. I am not one of the enemy. You needn't attack me as though I were."

"Who is the enemy, madam?"

"Madam! Have you forgotten my name?"

"I wish I could forget my own. Or accursed Ireland's."

"Accursed? Ireland? Why? Why, pray?"

His eyes, at first grim, now lightened, and he smiled. A cloud swept away by the sudden emergence of the sun.

"I've only just come back," he told Lady Earle, half-apologetically, "I'm sorry, Charlotte." He added: "Those damn French and their brutalities. Oh, I've had a time there! I hadn't realized it until I was back in Ireland."

"Poor Charles! How you appeared to be suffering," Lady Earle said, "when I spoke to you."

He laughed, then, and appeared like a young man, rather than the aging Hero whom the Irish were expecting, like Moses, to liberate them from their ancient captors.

"You always could see through a man, Charlotte," Charles Carney told her.

"There must be some connection between that and the fact," Lady Earle observed, "that I am—well—as I am."

"Beautiful, do you mean?"

"I've never been beautiful, Charles, (although I've made up for that, as you know.) No. I was not referring to anything in my appearance. I meant—unattached—as I remain. I remain, you see, with no one to dominate me."

"I'd like to see the one who could."

"And *I'd* so like to find the one who'd *try*," Lady Earle said, then sighed. "Judging from the way you eyed the dancers, Charles, I would think that if you were married your wife must be either tolerant or incontinent."

"Incontinent! I'm a soldier, not one of your dismal scholars. No. There's no wife. Ireland is my wife. My mistress. I'm faithful to her, to Ireland. Even in France . . . do you know why I was in France?"

"Do you want me to guess?"

"It doesn't matter. But I'll tell you. It was for Ireland whatever I do or think. However I act it's for Ireland."

"What is happening to France, Charles?"

But whatever it was that was happening to France could not yet be confided to Lady Earle's willing ears.

For the object of Captain Carney's eyes was the vision with the gleaming, fox-colored hair and jewel-like eyes; the flash of a smile that revealed teeth like glittering matched pearls.

"Lottie! Lottie!" the beautiful vision called. "Darling Lottie."

"My darling Antonia! I should not have come," Lady Earle said, "but for the hope of seeing you here."

"Not come?" the beautiful Antonia repeated, the crimson deepening in each cheek. "Not come, on this glorious Irish night?"

"Oh, it's Irish right enough." Charlotte Earle laughed. "Now, why were you so late?"

"And after I hurried so to get here—isn't that too aggravating? Our driver took a wrong turning. Imagine being lost on the way to Dublin! He chose north, when he should have turned south. It took us hours to find our way back to the main road. I wish I had a more glamorous alibi, like being held up by highwaymen. There are so many around now."

"Never mind—you're here—and the ball is more glamorous for that. Isn't that so, Charles?"

Lady Charlotte Earle turned and included her companion, who was hovering, and listening and, from his appearance, admiring.

"I would say so, yes. I would say so," he repeated, "if I were properly introduced—"

"The man needs no introduction," Lady Earle told Antonia. "He is Charles Carney, the—"

"We are dancing to you tonight, Charles Carney," Antonia Desmond exclaimed; the tiny flames in each cheek exactly matched. "You're heralded in Ireland from south to north."

"And among the French and the British as well, my dear," Lady Earle instructed her.

"The British have never paid attention to the Irish. Now that they are," Charles Carney said, "I can only regard it as salutary."

"Does salutary," Antonia inquired, "mean dangerous?"

"I'm a soldier," Charles Carney told her. "A soldier's lot is dangerous. The British interest now doesn't change that."

"Oh, if I were a man I'd be a soldier," Antonia Desmond asserted. Charles Carney decided that there was nothing more beautiful than a young

woman with pale, delicate skin, with crimson hair burningly reflected in each cheek.

"If you were a man," Charles Carney told her, "what a waste that would be."

"A waste!" Antonia exclaimed.

There was a flash to her eyes that the soldier perceived with admiration.

"I have thousands of men under me. Brave men, willing men, spirited men, but common as men are, every Irish man of them. About men I know whereof I speak. No, Miss Antonia. You must be as you are to bring pleasure to the poor creatures who must go through life as mere men—myself included."

"Charles Carney! A mere man!"

"An honest Irishman."

"A soldier. A hero."

"A soldier by accident. A hero by default."

"Is it an accident that you are here tonight?" Antonia wanted to know.

"It may have been an accident—my getting out of Paris when I did. And in one piece."

"What is happening there?" Antonia inquired.

"It's no place for ladies," Charles Carney informed Antonia. "It's no place for civilized humanity at all. Only a soldier is at home there, and only because he is inured to the disease of death."

"Why do you call it the disease of death?" Lady Earle wanted to know.

"Because of its contagion. Death has spread all through France like the plague. Here in Ireland I feel like a carrier of it myself."

He did not look like a man carrying death, or indeed bearing any kind of disease at all.

Charles Carney was a big man, a spirited man, an officer and—more important—a soldier, as he

claimed to be. In civilian clothes he would be known at once for his occupation. His chest was too wide for mere waistcoats and the silken jackets taken up by those who emulated English affectations.

To his men he was—like them—a fighter, an adventurer, a protector. He felt protective toward his poor country of Ireland and toward the Irish condemned—it seemed from eternity—to survive in it and to suffer its every burden.

Antonia gave a shudder. Her arms, her shoulders, were bare, her breasts daringly half-visible within the ice-blue gown she had on for the dance. Tiny, jewel-like buttons flashed in the candle-light of the large hall.

“Will it spread to Ireland, do you think?”

“The British would open their Exchanges to anyone who could inform them about that.”

“But no Irishman *would*.”

“Inform them? There are Irishmen who would settle for less.”

“The army makes you cynical, perhaps,” Antonia said.

“It makes a man capable of his potential. The army made *me*,” he said, “appreciative.”

“Appreciative,” Antonia repeated, “of what?”

“Of the beauty of women,” Charles Carney said.

“And of the transience of time.”

“Do soldiers dance?” Antonia wanted to know.

“Some do. Some regard it as frivolous. Most of us get little opportunity to. And what you don’t do often you can’t do well.”

“I take it, then,” Antonia observed, “that you will not attempt the dance floor.”

“Unless commanded.”

“It’s for you—a soldier—an officer—to com-

mand," she pointed out.

"Then I command you miss the next dance," Charles Carney said, as the music—a familiar waltz—floated airily from the strings of the musicians.

"It's a waltz. Most men respect waltzes. Anyway, they always appear to be relieved when they're played."

"The music," he said, "exactly suits you."

"Waltz music. I believe," she said, "I can do without a waltz."

Lady Earle had been observing the two—glancing lovingly at the fresh, exquisite Antonia, and regarding the forthright Charles Carney.

"I'm selfish enough to be grateful to you, Charles Carney. I want to keep her here to myself."

"Is there a conspiracy," Antonia said, amused, "to keep me from the dance floor?"

"The Irish," Lady Earle said, "are no strangers to conspiracy."

Antonia turned to Charles Carney.

"Would you agree, sir?" she asked.

"I've handled a few in my lifetime."

"In what way—handled?" inquired Antonia.

"There's only one way. Always the one way. It's done always the same throughout history. A short trial and a stout rope. It comes to us, descendant to descendant."

"Shouldn't it be improved, then?"

"Not even the Irish can improve history," the Irish hero told her.

"But if the stout rope doesn't work, shouldn't it be discarded?"

"Not until we produce something better."

"I should think it would be easy to produce some-

thing better than a rope to solve the problems of some pathetic creature who acts out some dark force in his sorry nature."

"The rope does its job. It stops the conspiracy at its source. How can that be improved on?"

"But does it stop conspiracy?"

"God alone can do that."

"Do you leave your battles to God to win for you?" Antonia inquired.

"I think, Charles, you will find Antonia a worthy adversary."

"*Adversary!*" Antonia exclaimed. "But adversary means opponent, and I oppose nothing that Captain Carney stands for. I am an adversary," she carefully explained, "only of the Captain's adversaries."

"Ireland," Charles Carney informed her, "is surrounded by them."

"Just now," Lady Earle reminded him, "you are surrounded by beauties, Irish beauties," she pointed out.

"Ah, you are indeed a beauty, Charlotte," Charles Carney told her.

The aging Lady Earle beamed at him. "You know I didn't mean that."

"Yes, but I did. I do. And you are right, Charlotte. I do find myself surrounded—confounded—by so much beauty."

His eyes encountered Antonia's. He thought he saw their color change.

—III—

For her part, Antonia looked and acted feverish.

She had been dancing for much of the evening and her partners had been appreciative, although they would have liked to be demonstrative. They had induced the radiance into her cheeks and Charles Carney's open admiration had kept it there. Now she looked around her. For escape?

Antonia was not conscious of desiring escape. Escape from the hero whom all Ireland honored and that the Irish beauties clustered about. Antonia was aware that others of her sisters among the celebrants observed Charles Carney's attentions and that soon she must be challenged by them for his favors. Let them challenge, Antonia thought. Let them have their hero. I throw him to you, she was thinking. Like a juicy bone to a hungry animal. But she knew that she would offer resistance. That Captain Carney *must* remain at her side until she was ready to release him. And from the look in his eye, his release was something he was decidedly not anticipating.

She turned back to him, "Tell me, Captain—" Antonia could put herself in the place of the other women, as they were danced past Lady Earle and Charles Carney and herself, or lingered in the background and poised there for the proper moment to either swoop or swoon.

"Tell me, Captain—. Will the French come to the aid of the Irish, do you think?"

"The French need aid now as much as do the Irish."

"What is it they want, Captain?"

"Bread, first. That seems to be what brings the population into the streets. Revolution. They call it revolution. They call what they want freedom but they are beneath no other nation's heel."

"Can't your own nation be as much of a threat as another?"

"I have no sympathy and less patience for countryman fighting countryman. Civil war. Brother against brother. Father against son. I oppose it. May it never happen to Ireland."

"In the name of freedom?" Antonia questioned.

"What is freedom?"

"How would I be expected to know what the Captain himself does not know? Still—I may not be able to describe freedom, but I recognize it when I don't have it."

"You are talking now of Ireland."

"No. Of England."

"It is not the time for those sentiments yet," Captain Carney warned Antonia.

She looked up at him candidly. "*When will* it be time?" Antonia wanted to know.

"Probably," he said, "you'll know before I do. The soldier is the last to find out. When the crisis comes, they call on us, and we're the ones to receive the bullets in the face. I don't expect anything to change that."

"I hope it will not be long."

"You're thinking only of the freedom part, not what has to be suffered before that can be achieved."

"Only the Irish," Lady Earle reminded them, "would talk of suffering on a night when all Dublin has turned out for pleasure."

Lady Earle was here in Dublin because the growing Irish town, already a capital city, in fact, could easily be reached from Copsley. This was still in the country, and the county miles into the peat-lands and protecting wood and streams. So near Dublin—the city could be reached in an hour's ride—hunters could go forth and return with pheasant, deer and rabbit—enough for dinner of wild game, with porter or hard cider or libations.

Lady Earle had been driven here in one of her fleet carriages, drawn by one of the thoroughbreds that Copsley spawned and, occasionally, sold, or, more likely, passed on as a gift of friendship.

"Touché," Antonia murmured.

"You're right, good lady. Lady Earle," the soldier conceded, "is right, you know. I've just returned from Paris—and violence there is a daily spectacle. I do not know how long it will be before it sweeps all before it. I cannot believe that that will happen to Ireland."

"They say there already are signs of just that—violence," Antonia said.

"I know nothing about it."

"You've only reached Ireland," Antonia reminded him, "as you say."

"I pray God to spare Ireland," Charles Carney said, "what France is experiencing."

"Oh, the Irish will never be like the French," Lady Earle asserted. "The French have no sense of humor."

"There's very little humor to be found," the Captain said, "in the midst of a civil war."

"And the Irish would never fight a *civil* war," Lady Earle said. "If it were to happen—and like you, Charles, I pray that Ireland be spared—it would be most un-civil indeed."

"Oh, the Irish won't fight each other," Antonia protested. "Like the Americans, Ireland will make war on the outsiders."

"The outsiders?" Lady Earle repeated.

"My darling Antonia," Lady Earle said, "you surely wouldn't war with me."

"With my friends? Heavens no," Antonia exclaimed.

"I had an English husband. I have an English grandparent. I went to English schools and have English friends, whom I have introduced to the Irish. I have thought all my life that England was my country, along with Ireland, that I love. Yes, I love Ireland," she continued, "as though it were my mother. England, though, I love like an uncle. I could never have strong feelings against an uncle."

"If you had an uncle who stole from you," Antonia pointed out. "Who locked you away, and kept the key in his pocket. Who then would not feed you, or allow you to be fed. Who assured you that you were not a prisoner but a resident, and yet guarded your every movement. That is the kind of uncle we have in England, Lottie. And that is why there is talk of an uprising."

"In Ireland," the Captain said, "there is always talk of an uprising."

"There *can* be no uprising," Antonia maintained, "without talk of one. Can there?"

"Yes. But is this the night for such talk?"

Antonia looked about her.

For moments she had forgotten the occasion. The

musicians were pursuing the ancient, limpid Irish melodies; the dancers a sea of swaying, weaving, warm and spirited bodies flooding the hall and occupying the dance floor. Their movements were beneath the shadowy lights, sensuous and buoyant; female figures melting into virile male forms.

No, the night was not one to linger upon the notion of war, revolution or violence—love was in the air.

Charles Carney, though, looked only at Antonia. It gave him something like pride to see her there before him. An Irish young lady. He could hardly take his eyes off her.

“A soldier talks about war the way a housewife,” he said, “talks about her preserves. I promise not to introduce the subject again.”

“It was I who introduced it,” Antonia challenged him.

“You talk like a soldier,” the soldier told her.

“Oh, if I *could* have been born a man—I would have been a soldier—or at least anything that was not a woman. A sham man. That’s what a woman in Ireland amounts to. An imitation man. I ride—but a man challenges and dominates a horse with his strength and skill. I cannot hunt—as a man does—killing game with a shotgun. Even rabbits are outside my domain. Oh, I am allowed to chase the fox along with a dozen others, but it’s the dogs that win every time. And I feel sorry for the wretched little fox pursued by so many riders, and horses, and vicious, baying hounds. My heart goes out to it. I would rescue it if I could. He reminds me of my poor countrymen, hounded and pursued from hole to hole, himself no match for the ruthless invaders.”

“Ruthless invaders. Really, Antonia,” Lady Earle interrupted.

"You're displeased with me. You called me Antonia," she reminded Charlotte sadly. She did not want the world displeased with her. Antonia loved Lady Earle like an older sister, or an aunt. Sometimes she thought of herself as loving too easily.

It probably showed in her face, in her eyes. Anyway, Charles Carney was unable to withdraw his own. "Displeased with you? It wouldn't," he declared, "be human to."

"No, my darling Tony. Your Lottie is not displeased with you, now or ever. But it's the times we live in. That's what gives me displeasure and some unease. I have bad dreams," she repeated. "I dreamed that Copsley had been burned to the ground.-"

"Copsley *burned*?" Antonia exclaimed.

"I was outside, at a great distance. It was night. The air was clear and black. I was approaching in my carriage and as I came toward it it burst into flames before my eyes. The horse reared and would go no closer. And I sat there in the back seat of my carriage, helpless, and watched my house, my home, my life, consumed by the blaze that nothing could stop now. Nothing did stop it. It flamed that way for hours as I sat a spectator in the open air and watched it until my heart broke and I awoke because of the pain of it."

"But if it was just a dream, Charlotte?"

"I told myself that, Charles. It was just a dream and when I awakened it was in my own broad bed, with Copsley surrounding me and protecting me exactly as it always had. And so it was no more than a harmless dream or nightmare. But dreams such as that—and the rumors and stories and threats that all of us hear—of Irishman against Irishman and the nation against the English will make it like America

here, or like the terrible civil war that's going on now in France."

"I'm sorry, Lottie," Antonia murmured.

"I certainly didn't intend to make light of your dream, Charlotte," Captain Carney said, hastily.

"And I surely did not intend to go into my dreams," Lady Earle told them, "in mixed company. However, it's been on my mind. I would have told you anyway," she told Antonia. "No doubt I couldn't have prevented myself."

"And not me?" Charles Carney said. "You would have kept it from me?"

"What would a man know about my feelings concerning Copsley. It *was* probably the soldiers—in my dream—that set the fire in the first place. Now, no more about it. It was a mistake to have made so much about a mere dream. My darling," Lady Earle exclaimed, to Antonia, "never quarrel with me. Promise."

"Promise? I *swear* it. What shall I swear on? My un-lived years? The years I have ahead of me, and that I must see. I *must*! I'll die first, Lottie darling, rather than displease you in anything."

The two ladies locked arms about each other, their eyes shining and moist, and embraced. Charles Carney stood observing, just outside the circle of their demonstrated ardor.

Lady Earle, looking out over the dance floor, had the faint lines of a laugh on her generous lips.

"How odd it is that our men show to such disadvantage in a ballroom. I have seen them in danger, and there they shine first of any, and one is proud of them. They should always be facing the elements—or fighting off danger." She glanced at the dancers, and then hitched forward.

“Wildhearne!” she exclaimed. “Why— isn’t that Wildhearne Lancing!”

“Wildhearne Lancing?” Antonia repeated. “Have I met him?”

“My dear—if you haven’t,” Lady Earle told her “it’s time you did.”

—IV—

It was, indeed, Wildhearne,

"Certainly it is Wildhearne," Lady Earle asserted. She had brought her delicate, gold-trimmed glasses to her eyes, and she had them trained now on the figures on the floor. "I had no idea he would be here tonight."

"Does he customarily report to you on his activities—this Wildhearne?" Antonia inquired.

"He is my neighbor," Lady Earle told Antonia. He was at dinner last week with me at Copsley. I have been his guest at Lislaughton."

"Lady Earle has a considerable following," Charles Carney observed, "among the young men."

"Young women, too," Antonia said, and patted the older lady's hand.

"Ah, that would make a man envious," the Captain asserted.

"He's coming this way," Lady Earle pronounced, as though she had not heard Charles Carney and Charles Carney's rather sly asides. "Do you see? Wildhearne is dancing this way."

"He dances well," Antonia noted.

"He rides well," Lady Earle said. "He shoots well and rides with the hounds as though he were part wild animal. I assure you, Antonia, that Wildhearne Lancing is the consummate young man."

"I no longer judge men on their dancing, riding and hunting," Antonia confessed, "although when I was younger—"

"Listen to the creature. When she was younger." Lady Earle repeated.

"I was frivolous, you *know* I was," she tapped Lady Charlotte's arm lightly and lovingly with her fingertips. "I only saw the surfaces of people—men. I looked to men for breeding—for skill with the rifle—for his seat on a horse. I no longer regard that of the slightest consequence."

"How a man looks is no longer of the slightest consequence?" Lady Earle echoed, aghast.

"It makes not the slightest difference how a soldier looks," the Captain stated. "I've been too wrong about men to pick or judge them from appearance."

"His beliefs—. That not only makes a soldier," Antonia said, "but it declares the man."

Wildhearne Lancing reached them at just that moment. The music had stopped (although they had not noticed it) and Wildhearne, having discovered Lady Earle with her glasses upon him, had relinquished his partner to another gentleman and joined the three—Antonia, Lady Earle and the admiring Captain.

"*What*," Wildhearne wanted to know, "declares the man?"

"You will find that Wildhearne has no beliefs," Lady Earle announced. "I was telling my friends about you, Wildhearne."

"That is hardly fair," Wildhearne protested, "with no one here to defend me."

"Defend you? I regard myself as the first line of your defenders. No one," Lady Earle stated, "could speak against you in my presence."

"You may well believe that, young man," Captain Carney assured him.

"You, sir," Wildhearne said to the Captain, after having glanced forthrightly at Antonia and then looked away, as though his eyes had been struck by some dazzling light, "are the guest of the Irish nation tonight."

"I acknowledge that to be true, young man," Captain Carney admitted glumly.

"The Captain is just in from Paris and is full of news about what's going on there."

"It is not what is going on there. It is whose head is coming off there. What are the fashions for men among our French brethren?"

"Red is the most fashionable color, in Paris and all over France."

"Red? For gentlemen?"

"For ladies, too," Charles Carney told him. "The French recognize no distinctions."

"The French have always been barbarous," Wildhearne stated, "although with a sense of style."

"Their sense of style has never failed them. As to their being barbarous—some of the French may come to agree—"

"As one does—as one must—about the color red. It surely is barbaric. Do you expect gentlemen to tolerate it?"

"Some already have," the Captain answered.

"Are they in Paris?"

"They *were* in Paris. They're someplace now. Maybe in hell," the Captain said.

"In hell. Did you say in hell?" Wildhearne inquired.

"They may as well be," Captain Carney said.

"Why, to be in Paris," Wildhearne said, "is much the same thing."

"I agree with you. France is a living hell."

Wildhearne's face registered a change, though watching it you would have found yourself hard put to decipher his expression. Distaste? Disdain? Surprise?

Studying Wildhearne Antonia thought she discovered how spoiled the fine features made him appear to be, the clear, dark-brown eyes, and full, almost girlish in their delicacy.

Alongside Wildhearne, Charles Carney looked, Antonia decided, to be carved from a tree. Looking on now, the Captain appeared to be of that species of Irish that you saw making his way along Grafton Street, or at the reins of his cart wheeling in from the counties to the markets in the city. His good, broad, sober face and look was one that inspired trust and belief and confidence. Antonia thought that men would be confident in his leadership and follow him, if not without question, or even a depth of fervor, at least knowing that they could not only entrust themselves to him but that he would be as protective of them as they would be of each other, or of themselves.

Wildhearne, on the other hand, thought Antonia, was entirely of another breed.

He was as slender as a boy, with lithe limbs, already so much admired by Lady Earle, more like a sapling than the weathered tree that Captain Carney appeared to be.

There was a strength to him, she decided, but it was not readily visible. Still, she found herself drawn to him, without being able to explain to herself the source of this sensation. She felt grateful to Lottie for having brought her together with two such diverse Irish men. Her own experience of the mas-

culine sex did not inspire in her the confidence that the Irish males she had moved among were truly the flowering of the race.

"The French are always quarreling among themselves," Wildhearne was saying.

"They are like the Irish in that," Lady Earle observed.

"Yes. Though it usually does not come to blood. The Irish stop just short of shedding their own, I've noticed," Wildhearne said. "They prefer others to do the bleeding for them."

"I have experienced no such thing," Captain Carney told him, crisply.

"You've been out of the country," Wildhearne said. "The Irish are like myself. I see them as I see myself in the shaving glass. I can observe for myself all the blemishes and disfigurements reflected there. And I can read the faces around me because they are so much my own. Whereas with you, sir," Wildhearne said. "you have had less opportunity than I."

"Disfigurements? Blemishes?" Antonia put in. "I can perceive none at all in your features, Mister Lancing."

She had looked into his face as he was speaking and she became instantly then conscious of her heartbeats.

Antonia sighed.

She rarely concealed—rarely *could* conceal—the most subterranean of her emotions and sensations. And she hardly cared whether they were observed or not.

Now Antonia felt her whole body blush. Her face, she was aware, already showed crimson; the heat in each cheek she only sensed. Now she felt the warmth

surge and encompass her fully, settling in her bosom; it covered them and radiating inward from there until her heart itself was penetrated by the warm, flooding waves.

"Come back with me to Copsley tomorrow," Lady Earle said, impulsively. "The place is almost empty. I shall want it inhabited for awhile. All of you." She made an encircling gesture. "I shall want you all around me. Charles."

"I have only come from Paris. There are many preparations I shall be forced to make before I return there."

"Is it true that the French are planning to invade us, to get at the English?" Lady Earle challenged him.

"If they are, they would hardly confide in me," the Captain smiled. "Still, I can make a judgement. The French are in no position to invade even one of our counties, let alone this country. At the moment they are murdering each other and perpetrating other outrages upon the multitudes, so that one must believe them to be too taken up to be making any plans involving anyone outside themselves."

Lady Earle demanded, "What about you, Wildhearne?"

"Oh, I am not perpetrating outrages against anyone," he shrugged.

"I would hardly have believed that you were," Antonia laughed.

"You think me incapable?" he challenged Antonia.

"Perhaps, that. But I think rather it is an extravagance that you would be unwilling to undertake."

"You may be wrong about Wildhearne, Tony. He is a tireless rider and a relentless hunter. Many a fox

would testify to that, if it were alive to. What do you say?" She launched the power of her determined will upon Antonia. "Will you come with me to Copsley? Who knows," she asked of no one in particular, "you might inspire Wildhearne to perpetrate something outrageous."

—V—

Now in the year 1792 the peasantry was at last stirring.

For perhaps the first time in the sorry story of Ireland the Irish had begun to seize upon primitive action of their own.

In Louth and Meath and Wicklow and in counties even more adjacent to Ulster, the Defenders made themselves known by asserting a more and more aggressive role.

The Defenders' actions were like those of other secret societies that were for so long a feature of Irish life and living. Many who took part in the raiding of gentlemen's houses for arms and horses had little distinction in their minds between these and the storied raids of past years.

All over Ireland a new organized and daring pattern of action under the banner of the Defenders was becoming clear and inevitable.

Defenders, acting more and more on the principle that attack—any attack—was indeed the best form of defence, had started appearing in armed bodies in the south and by the end of the year they had spread all through the northern counties, and had attacked some forty houses for arms, for the most part successfully.

In the last weeks of the year they came together in ebullient numbers; first at Dunlear and then at Dundalk, armed with guns and with whatever weapons they could carry concealed.

Their exact purpose did not at once become clear; it was hinted that they would attempt to liberate a large number of convicts that had been rounded up and were awaiting transportation to Australia. No military were available to deal with the "elements" though newspaper accounts reported that "respectable persons" of the town had circulated among them and tried (without success) to persuade them to disperse.

The same newspapers were forced to report about two weeks later that insurrection was spreading and the insurgents' aims were described variously as the abolition of tithes and the lowering of rents. In Louth, it was rumored, the first objective appeared to be to seize arms and ammunition.

Not a night passed after that that the Defenders did not assemble and break open houses in some part of the county. It was told how a hundred-fifty of them on horseback and afoot with a drum and three sleds had raided the house of Lord Maxwell, however, they had behaved with "some degree of politeness."

After seizing three double-barrelled guns, two muskets and two cases of pistols, his Lordship, who was particularly fond of one of the cases of pistols, requested if he could buy it back from them. The Defenders complimented Lord Maxwell on his taste and returned the pistols to him, refusing the money.

"This house," wrote a correspondent, "now looks more like a bastille than a palace, from the quantity of bolts, bars and cross barricades on the doors and windows of the house and buildings.

“Are these disturbances in Ireland,” the same newspaper queried, “on account of any secret grievances? No. They are not. They arise from the pure wantonness of a set of desperados called the Defenders—encouraged and financed by secret conspirators that—like the French revolutionaries—want to destroy the power of all governments.”

Retribution was not long in catching up with this primitively governed movement, and the Defenders were soon being hanged whenever they were caught.

Sixty-eight Defenders were reported as being sentenced to death while an additional fifty-three were transported to Australia for taking or administering the oath of the Defender.

The cheapness with which the Defenders regarded life right up to the final bloodbath was always the most impressive tribute to the desperation with which they pursued their emotional crusade. And though the sentence of capital punishment was at this period a particularly gruesome one, including as it did the phrase “—yet being still alive, should be cut down; but being alive their bowels (are) to be taken out and burned before their faces,” it seems to have had surprisingly little force as a deterrent.

“Defenderism,” wrote the English Prime Minister, “puzzles me—but it grows more alarming daily, as the effect of the execution seems to be at an end and there is an emotion defying all punishment.”

The Prime Minister need not have been puzzled. Something like the expression of the long aggressive grievance of the common people’s suffering was being exposed by these martyred defenders of the Irish struggle.

—VI—

Wildhearne Lancing was a name one heard everywhere in the best Irish society; soon Antonia was to become familiar with this. Rich, handsome, courteous, generous, lord of the Lislaughton house, he excited women as no one else did. Adulation of the young man's wit and aristocratic bearing, his manners and temperament and moral virtues resounded throughout the county and, indeed, beyond the provincial little area.

Wildhearne talked charmingly, danced divinely, rode with the abstracted air of the commander-in-chief, had the most natural grand carriage possible, without ceasing for a moment to be the youthful Irish gentleman. What other comparisons could be made? Who was there throughout Ireland to compare?

He had received from his adoring mother, his father having much earlier departed the world, the education of a prince. His composure while the showers of adulation drenched him was god-like. Still, he was forced to continue in his princely ways, courting, dancing, balancing himself exactly, head to right, head to left, addressing his admirers in choice,

well-turned phrases.

That is to say that it is easier to be a god on his throne than a prince in the flesh, yet Wildhearne was equal to the task. The little prince's education teaches him that he is different though his instruction and indoctrination, and something within that is understood imperfectly, he is enabled to maintain his composure when others would be in a state of collapse.

Lancings marry money. They are not a romantic people—(only an unromantic brother remained of the immediate Lancings)—and the great question for the county was proposed and disposed of at dinners and gatherings.

This is the dilemma of the young prince. (Who shall I marry?) It is being dwelt on here as an example to poor ardent commoners with no such choices to confuse them.

Wildhearne Lancing, then, might be said to enjoy this dilemma. There were ladies at each hand for him. Susceptible to beauty, he had never seen so beautiful a creature as Constantia Dalton. But there were also Rose Larkin. Shannon Peele. Marigold Craven. Kathleen O'Shea. Not to do injustice to pretty little Esther Fowler, by oversight. And Melissa Hutton. There was, too, his beautiful and spirited cousin (cousins of her dimensions were eligible for families such as Wildhearne's) Melinda O'Dougherty. Dilemmas.

Take Constantia, for one. (Forget Esther and Melinda, Rose and the others he could not always keep straight in his mind.) Constantia's beauty had the glory of a racing cutter, he thought, full sail on a headlong breeze. Earlier—before all the others—in his more reflective moments the attractiveness of

Constantia caused him to ache with pleasure. To add to the complexity of his state, Wildhearne gloried in his liberty. He felt princelier free. He had more subjects. More slaves. He ruled arrogantly in the world of women. He was more himself.

—VIII—

There were those, unlike Antonia, who *would* have left Ireland just then. None went to the moon, of course, but America received those who found their way there. (France, divided and savagely, morbidly shedding the royal blood that fed into its stream through all those centuries, was helpless and too dangerous for the migration that weakened Ireland.)

A new, young Ireland, vibrant with expectations and brusque demands, was rousing itself, stirring, arming itself in secret and by stealth, and threatening the old foundations.

British rule was being challenged, challenged everywhere; a new movement was emerging from the somnolent past, where peasants knuckled under to landlords, and landlords derived their strength from the army that the English raised and supported and filled with the sons of those same powerless peasants. Like France, it was blood-brother against blood-brother.

The army with its awkward Irish recruits would be sent out against the demonstrations that were taking place wherever a crowd could meet; in a church with the knowledge of the priests, and often without) in the choir-loft, where women's voices were raised along with men's, in country towns and village halls, even in some county houses.

For this movement attracted only the young and undefeated and those among the Irish gentry whose spiritual senses had not been permanently mutilated by pursuit of a life so alien to the rest of their deprived countrymen.

Wolfe Tone was on the scene and gave it support and leadership; but there were Irishmen—many such—who went their own way. They named themselves the Defenders and went their own way. There was a leadership there but it was not Tone's, nor indeed *any* politician's.

The leadership was underground and secret. All Ireland knew of their existence. Followers of Tone were often, stealthily, members of the bloody underground, just as faithful Catholics slipped away at night and offered support to their fellow defenders.

What they were defending was their nation, their county, their province, their pitiful share of land, their low, crowded houses and homes and farms. What they defended was what the French were murdering for, what, in the end, men fight for, and live for which they will even die for, in Ireland, in China, in France, in America—the dignity and stature and very nature of manhood cornered and threatened by alien forces.

The Defenders had begun in the caves and alleys and cellars of cities, had spread quickly (like a contagion) from Belfast and Dublin into the countryside; everywhere leaving behind a mark of its existence.

The country homes became frequently a target of the ravaging Defenders. They moved in Indian fashion, stealthily, mainly at night; and struck suddenly (sometimes lethally and dangerously for themselves); armed themselves at their adversaries' expense, and

vanished into the Irish mists. They came together again on another night, under some lowering sky, at another site; they ran the risks of being taken and executed but often succeeded in their unexpected attacks.

In this way they took arms, ammunition, livestock and the money that such a movement of men and horses demanded. The followers of Wolfe Tone were growing. Hatred was growing. Hatred of the English and resistance was increasing, and mobs were turning themselves into armies—secret armies that declared bloody war on those wearing a uniform and defending an alien king.

The Defenders had never molested Lislaughton. Lislaughton lay in a quiet county, where gentry like Wildhearne pursued a life devoted to sports and, in Wildhearne's case, the pleasures of the salon. Who would be the future mistress of Lislaughton was of more importance in the minds of those with estates bordering Lislaughton than the latest raid upon His Majesty's troopers, strategically placed just where they could be surprised, attacked and sometimes slaughtered.

The raids against county homes were disturbing to read about, though out here the land remained unblemished and undisfigured by any such shocking events. Consequently, their occurring elsewhere was not often perceived, except as news that the journals preoccupied themselves with in the fine print that described the occasions but failed to give them any reality

—IX—

At Lislaughton Wildhearne lived with only his brother as the family. Quintin Lancing was a year younger than Wildhearne and the opposite of his brother in very nearly every respect. Smaller, squarer (Wildhearne's figure was tall and lithe), earnest and methodical, Quintin's common features could be traced back to the ancestors in their frames hanging in the great Hall of Lislaughton.

Quintin's interests differed entirely from those of Wildhearne. He preferred books. He was to be found usually carrying a book on his walks and with several books at his feet and alongside him when he was in his own apartments in the house. Nor were they books of the popular romances of the period. Should anybody glance at their titles—he did not suffer guests to sit with him, and appeared to have no intimates, and to require none—he would discover that they were often devoted to chemistry and works of an organic character, having detailed diagrams and many eye-blinding, dense footnotes.

Wildhearne's brother kept to himself much of the time, except when his small cousin, Dunstan, was about the estate—then the two would go off suitably equipped for a day in the fields pursuing butterflies, or tracking birds (though only for the scientific information to be derived from the exercise, certainly

not to imperil the creatures), or for a ride on a pair of the gentler beasts from the stables, for Quintin had no wish to challenge Wildhearne's undisputed supremacy in the saddle.

A boy is always more hospitable to danger than is a mature man. Dunstan was no exception. Despite his proximity to Quintin, and his relish of their shared pursuits, he would have preferred a shotgun to a fishing-rod, a raid to an hour of bird-watching.

"They were out again last night," Dunstan observed.

"Who?" Quintin inquired, blankly.

"The Defenders, of course."

"I know nothing about all that," Quintin said, rather grimly.

"I heard them talking about it."

"I daresay they didn't know you were listening. Did they?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you must know."

"I didn't tell anybody I was listening."

"You were hiding, I take it."

"Hiding!" Dunstan repeated. "What do you take me for?"

"They surely wouldn't have talked in your presence."

"I *was* present. They just didn't look for me. And—," he plunged on, over Quintin's attempted interruption, "I heard them say that a raiding party—a *raiding party*," the boy savored the words with rising delight, "rode up to the Drummonds and took away all their horses—and then demanded food and supplies for themselves. And then I guess they attacked somewhere else."

"Was anyone hurt?"

"The Defenders didn't lose a man!"

"What about the Drummonds? They're neighbors, friends. If they were hurt, wouldn't that make you unhappy for them?"

"Then why do the Defenders raid them that way? It must be that the Drummonds—"

"I know nothing against the Drummonds," Quintin said. "They are known for an excellent character."

"You never accept their invitations."

"How do you know I *get* invitations?"

"You do. Don't you?"

"You appear to know more about it than I do."

"I talk more than you do, that's all."

"I've remarked that," Quintin said.

"You're not peeved? We'll come out again tomorrow, won't we, Quintin? Won't we?"

"You know I don't make promises."

"Never?"

"I *never* say never."

"I guess I couldn't be like you."

"No. It appears not."

"You're *not* peeved, Quintin?"

"I wouldn't say peeved."

"You've read more books than I have. That's it."

"I am not reading books now," Quintin told the boy.

"Why? Have you finished them all?"

"You think I prefer books to people?"

"Don't you?"

"Do you think so?" The boy did not answer. "I don't usually accept invitations—the Drummonds' or anybody's—" he told his young cousin. "That certainly does not mean that I prefer books to people. Or that I don't hold the Drummonds in the greatest

regard."

"When they come to Lislaughton you're not here," Dunstan pointed out.

"They come to visit Wildhearne," Quintin said. "Not to see me."

"They would, wouldn't they?" the boy pursued, "if you did what Wildhearne did."

"I have no intention of emulating my brother."

"He wants everybody to come to Lislaughton."

"I know nothing at all about what he wants," Quintin disclaimed.

"You *know* that Wildhearne—"

"Have you been listening again to what doesn't concern you?" Quintin demanded.

"People *will* talk."

"And you *will* listen. Now pay attention. Have you seen any specimen so far?"

"Specimen?" the boy repeated, doubtfully. "Do you mean butterflies?"

"Perhaps you don't want to look for any this morning."

"I'd rather do this," Dunstan confessed, "than go bird-watching. At least, you don't frighten the birds by talking."

"It's too late for bird-watching."

"*There's* one—" Dunstan propelled himself toward a broad-winged, fluttery creature but it instantly flew toward the top of a tree. You could see the sun reflected through its wide, radiant wings.

"That surely is not the way you were taught to approach it," Quintin lectured him, but could not help smiling.

"I didn't want him to get away."

"They've been given wings," Quintin told his cousin, "for a purpose."

"And guns. If you had a gun," Dunstan said, "nothing would get away."

"I doubt if a gun would be of any help to you with a butterfly."

"If I had a gun I could join a raiding party."

"I know of no raiding parties that recruit twelve-year-olds."

"I'll be thirteen—"

"That still leaves you five years to go. Besides, it's demanding. It's dangerous. And it's unlawful."

"Unlawful?"

"Unlawful. You're hanged when you are caught, you know."

"I wouldn't be caught," the boy boasted. "I'd never be caught."

"A very good thing," Quintin approved. "We'd have a difficult time getting used to you without a head."

"I'm not frightened," Dunstan proclaimed.

"You have no reason to be. You're protected and—so far at least—law-abiding."

"The Defenders are never afraid."

"You know nothing whatever about it."

"I know *I*'d never be afraid."

"I hope you never have cause to be."

"Would *you* be, Quintin? Would you be afraid?"

"Yes. For you," Quintin said. "It frightens me very much to think of you as an outlaw. Thank God, it will all be behind us by the time you're eighteen. In the meantime, learn what you can."

"There are no butterflies in Dublin."

"You know less than I do about Dublin," Quintin reminded the boy, "and what I know is less than nothing."

"I'm going to live in Dublin," his cousin said.

"Lislaughton might very well be yours one day. You can't take it to Dublin with you."

"I could live in Dublin with a house in the country. But no! They wouldn't permit it."

"Who wouldn't?" Quintin inquired. "Who wouldn't permit you?"

"The Defenders."

"I really don't think we—"

"The Defenders don't approve of absentee landlords. The Defenders say—"

"I don't care to hear their views on anything."

"They say that a house should be occupied by the family responsible for it," Dunstan continued, like a child bolting a mouthful. "I believe that. Don't you believe that?"

"They are outlaws. I don't think you ought to be repeating the words of outlaws here."

"The law is English law, the Defenders say. And the Defenders are Irishmen. Irish men are not subject, the Defenders say, to English law. It's an alien law. I believe that."

"You are not of the age to believe anything yet."

"God? What about God? Am I too young to believe in God?" Dunstan wanted to know. "I guess if I can believe in God, I can believe in men, like the Defenders."

"Believe me," Quintin cautioned the boy, "when I tell you that there is only danger in your romantic attitudes. Such men are playing into the hands of the British. Don't you see," he demanded, "that the English are only eager to sieze upon some reason for occupying the whole of Ireland? Raids and the kind of terrorism practiced by outlaws provide them with the excuse they need. There are English troops on

Irish soil right now. The actions of the Defenders will be used to bring in thousands more."

"Then the Defenders will deal with them, too."

"Who," Quintin wanted to know, "spoke to you about the Defenders?"

"Nobody *talks* to me—" Dunstan defended himself, "except you. I just listen."

"Listen more to your lessons."

"I don't need lessons," the boy said, "if I grow up to be a raider."

"Put that nonsense out of your head."

"If I were your age," Dunstan said, "I'd be a raider."

"Be glad you're not."

"Are *you* glad you're not?"

"I feel sure," Quintin warned, "we are missing some unique specimens—"

"I'm sorry, sir," Dunstan said. "But my heart isn't in it today."

They walked together for awhile at a slow pace. The sun was smoky and warm in the rich sky. Young Dunstan had evidently been surprised into speaking what was on his mind—and in his heart—and very possibly now was having anxieties because he had shared his views with an adult, who was always of a doubtful loyalty to the young.

The two moved in silence until Quintin stopped at a fallen tree and they sat down together.

"Now, Dunstan," Quintin addressed him, like a headmaster, "I like brave lads, and I respect you for wanting to defend your nation." Dunstan started to brighten dubiously. "Only how can you, if you have no learning?"

"I can learn to shoot a gun. I can already ride a horse. I can learn to say, 'Turn over your arms to

me, sir—I speak for Ireland.”

“There are too many already who can shoot guns—too many who *do*. No, you’ll have to train yourself in more than threats and violence. I’ve noticed that you never pick up a book, except when your lesson is due.”

“Everybody watches me,” the boy grumbled. “We should be watching, ourselves,” Quintin cautioned him, “butterflies—birds—that’s why we walked so far, isn’t it?”

“Why do I have to know about birds? Men only hunt them, anyway.”

“You’ll be a new man—a new Irishman. One day you will be of the breed of Irishmen who doesn’t kill what he fails to understand. And one day the birds themselves may be vanishing from their usual haunts. And other Irishmen and Irishwomen will require a witness to their existence as they once looked in surroundings like these, which may vanish, too.”

“Will that happen?”

“I am sincerely troubled by it,” Quintin said. “I hope not. I certainly hope not. But it may happen. I am not ready yet to say that it won’t happen.”

“Then what will become of you?”

Quintin gave a rare smile. If you were more perceptive than a young boy who was glad to see the smile, you observed that the reason Quintin did not smile often was that the smile did not become him. His teeth curved and receded. He was much better—he looked much more of a man when his mouth was set, and he was frowning.

“I may have vanished along with all this.” He gave an encompassing wave of an arm. “I’m two-and-thirty now,” he confided, “and when you are of age I

shall probably have put in my time and subsided."

"Two-and-thirty!" the boy repeated, awed. "*That* old?"

"I saw some butterflies just now lower down toward the park," Quintin reminded the boy. "We must not go back to the house empty-handed."

"When I am two-and-thirty," Dunstan announced, "I shall be a hero."

"Perhaps," Quintin said, "you will have to leave Ireland to do so."

"I shall never desert Ireland while it needs me," Dunstan asserted.

"Ireland will always need its sons—even more than it needs heroes. You would be right to stay. Where would you go? Where would we go?"

The boy looked up inquiringly at Quintin. "Are you going to leave?"

Quintin regarded his young cousin gravely. He was the only one who spoke to the boy and demonstrated patience with him, and gentle tolerance, and did not laugh at the notion of a freckled hero astride a horse too big for him and proclaiming, "I speak for Ireland!"

"I cannot stay here forever," he told his young cousin. "One day Wildhearne will marry and the house will belong to him and his lady—whoever she may be. I would be in the way."

"Would you go to America? Would you fight the Indians?"

"I've told you enough," Quintin said, "for now. Remember, this is your lesson."

"Don't you think it'll rain?"

"It will," Quintin corrected him. "Or it will not. 'It'll' is a rank corruption."

"Do you think it will rain?"

The sun was low—or lowering—and its setting looked threatening and increasingly bleak. There was a taste of rain in the air that blew upon Quintin's lips and cheek. He inhaled the moist air and looked regretfully at the uninhabited acres before them and around them.

"I suppose we might go back," he told the boy, and got up and walked slowly back toward where they had earlier started from. Dunstan was off like a raiding party, transforming himself into an armed rider galloping up to a cloistered estate late at night and announcing—with a shotgun aimed straight ahead of him, "The Defenders demand your arms."

It was a kind of ambition, Quintin told himself. When *he* was the boy's age—and he could no longer imagine himself in so primitive a stage of development, like a butterfly when it was no more than a caterpillar—what ambition had he acknowledged, what dream sustained his young days?

Had he, indeed, thought of anything other than himself, and what had been taken from him, and what others had received? Who spoke for Ireland then? Anyone? No one? There were soldiers in uniform policing the countryside, and nobody then had remarked their presence. At the great balls and suppers conversation never alluded to the King's guards whose armed appearance could be anticipated in the green shades of nature and/or the cobbled walkways of the towns and cities.

He had not thought to himself of taking up arms—as Dunstan was thinking—and imposing himself upon Ireland as its spokesman and its hero. He had planned only to leave one day when the time should be ripe, and then it would probably be no farther away than Paris, where there were great tem-

ples of education, and where he could go and read his way through his life. Was that ambition? Was that an aim?

Quintin thought of Wildhearne. Wildhearne himself, he supposed, must once have dreamed of removing himself, until their mother died, which loosened Quintin's ties and even his claims to Lislughton in his brother's favor. For their mother had never kept private her desire to have Wildhearne inherit the estate, and her will had strengthened the solitariness of Wildhearne's command of the great house, which had been in their mother's possession through her father's and her father's ancestry. Of his own father, Quintin remembered nothing at all.

There was a step at Quintin's heels. Wildhearne. He had only just been thinking of his brother, and to have him materialize as if through the rubbing of a lamp was bizarre, to say the least.

—X—

"I see you have been pacifying the young scapegrace," Wildhearne greeted his brother.

"Not pacifying, I hope," Quintin said. "I tried to give him a lecture."

"Good! He's a dear lad, but he wants training. He'd better get it, too, or he'll never get into the Navy."

"The boy doesn't want to get into the Navy."

Wildhearne looked startled. Quintin regarded his brother resignedly. Everything became him—even looking startled. Even out here on the downs, in country clothes and walking brogues, he looked as he always did when he entered a room full of ladies waiting there for his initial appearance.

"Not want the Navy? Haven't we been listening for more than two years to the whelp's babbling on the subject?"

"That was when he was ten. Now he disdains the Navy—and the Army. They're too British for him."

"And so they are. But what substitute is there for him?"

"Have you talked to him?" Quintin asked, for some reason evasive.

"No. Otherwise I would have known that he had backed off from the Navy. Pity. I might have had some influence there. What else is there? He cares nothing for the land."

"He is conscious now of being Irish, I think."

"And so am I. And so are you, dear Quintin. But is that a sufficient career? Oh, no," Wildhearne asserted. "it's obvious he's quite spoiled here. I can't guess at the ideas he has for his own future but his chance of passing for the Navy had better not be trifled with. If ever there was a boy made for the Navy, it is Dunstan—"

"The lad doesn't seem to think so. He—"

"Don't tell me about him." Quintin added, "What does he say?"

"Quite a few things, Wildhearne. Shall I call him—and you can question him for himself."

"I find him most unruly. And you give him his head too much, I find. Call him? Would he come if you called?"

"He often doesn't," Quintin admitted.

"You were never a lad like that. Nor was I—"

"We tend to forget—"

"I have an excellent memory."

"Ireland was different then, too—"

"Why?" There was an unexpected sharpness to Wildhearn's tone. "What has that got to do with it?"

"I don't know—." Quintin was rarely at ease with Wildhearne. Something arose between them when they met and separated them irrationally. Quintin felt himself growing defensive. Wildhearne assumed the older brother, proprietary air that older brothers often irritate their not-much-younger brothers with. It was this way now.

Quintin kept his peace.

"I must get him away from this place very soon," Wildhearne said, as though thinking aloud.

"We shall miss him."

"Yes. I suppose I shall. I suppose *you* will—since

you concerned yourself so much with the lad—”

“I cared no more for books than he did,” Quintin said, “when I was that age.”

“You can’t mean that—”

“But I do. I certainly do!”

“I don’t believe I have a single memory of you without a book between you and me.”

“There are pictures to prove it,” Quintin smiled.

“As for that tyke, he’d better learn what’s good for him—”

“I’ve been thirty-two years at that, without much success.”

“You’ve always been too modest about yourself, Quintin,” his brother stated. “Besides, Dunstan has not your merits—he lacks your serene nature—and I think he is both secretive and headlong. He’ll get into trouble—and he’ll draw us all in with him.”

“You’re too harsh with him—”

“You’re too soft with him.”

“Perhaps. I find him a good lad.”

“He minds you,” Wildhearne said. “You may put it in his head, so that he’ll get used to the idea. There are seaport crammers,” Wildhearne told Quintin, “who stuff young fellows for the Navy examinations—”

“Why don’t you tell him?”

“Because it’s only now coming into focus. Besides I only think about him when I see him. And I only see him by accident.”

“Perhaps it would be different if *you* took over his education.”

“I certainly would be no improvement over *you*. No,” Wildhearne said, thoughtfully, “we shall have to pack off the young wretch to the most competent sea-dog we can find. I would rather have had him

with us for longer, so that he went away with something of substance in his head. But he is ruined here, Quintin. That's my fault—and—*our* fault—"

"The boy won't like it."

Wildhearne sighed. "At his age I was never patient with anything, either."

—XI—

"The house is so alive again, Tony," Lady Earle said, "now that you are here."

"Dear Lottie—"

"Darling Tony. I'm *so* glad—"

They were sitting in this day-room, which Lady Earle had had furnished for her own comfort. All the other rooms at Copsley were too cold, too large and too fastidious for the kinds of conversation the two women ran to.

They sat or lounged among the abundant pillows and talked in gossipy tones that could not be overheard, although the house servants were circumspect, had their own duties which kept them in various parts of the house and left their mistress to her own whims. You could be in the house for hours and hear nothing but subdued rustles issuing from a corner or a staircase. Which certainly suited Antonia. Antonia was at home with the informal, the undemanding (except in ethics and morality, and perhaps religion, where she was as scrupulous as St. Peter himself).

"I am happy that you like it here," Charlotte Earle told her. "I, personally, can hardly stand it." She gave a convincing shudder.

"It's lovely."

"Now," Lady Earle conceded, "it is. Please," she appealed, "stay forever."

"I'm very much afraid," Antonia said, "that nothing—Ireland or *anything*—will last forever—"

"Oh, Ireland will be the last to succumb to whatever it is that wrecks the world."

Antonia looked serious. Serious, Charlotte observed, the girl appeared even more entrancing than with her laughing lips, her dancing eyes.

Lady Earle sighed.

She had been a beauty herself, once,—a certain age, because Lady Charlotte was not old—had scattered her looks, so that—with her gray hair and somewhat dulled flesh—she looked now like a mother to her former self. She did not, however, wish to dwell on that.

It gave her, she thought, too much pleasure to gaze upon the girl's features and identify with them. The Irish beauty is famous throughout the world, throughout history. But Antonia's beauty was not that. It was special, distinct and unique. In Rome she would have been accepted as a rare Italian beauty, a beauty with fair skin, hair lustrous and radiant and eyes so blue that they looked purple in some lights. Men who looked into those dreaming eyes often looked away quickly as though they had accidentally looked right into the sun.

Those eyes were grave and shadowed by the dense lashes that shielded them behind their silken web.

"It certainly seems tranquil here," Antonia said.

"If the civil war everybody is predicting breaks out," her friend told Antonia, "we would be the last to discover it. Our neighbors," she said, "dedicate their hours to chasing the fox and pursuing the grouse. They could be in England, for all they know or care."

"Is that true of your neighbor, Wildhearne—does

he chase the fox and the grouse?"

"Wildhearne," Lady Earle replied, "*does* vary his pursuits interestingly."

"Then why hasn't he overtaken the creatures of his pursuits?"

"Because they constantly vary," Lady Earle said. "Once he overtakes them he seems to lose interest."

"Poor creatures."

"Yes. They are like the fox with the horses and hounds and men all at their heels—except that they don't see themselves as the fox until the chase is over. Then they know that they have been a victim—exactly like the fox, poor thing."

"Poor things."

"They understand what they are doing. Wildhearne's reputation is well-known here—there is no attempt to conceal it—if it *could* be concealed."

"I dislike the hunt myself. I'm very un-Irish that way, I know."

"You are yourself, Tony."

"Oh, I'm Irish all right."

"It wouldn't matter if you were Portugese—or some other terrible breed. It would not matter to me—"

"Oh, the Irish can be a terrible breed, too—"

"You are feeling depressed," Lady Earle said, "about the Irish. My dear, we are not worth it."

"I am feeling serious—but not depressed," Antonia protested.

"It must be this house," Lady Earle said. "It makes everyone serious."

"I find it charming."

"We'll fill it with noise. Shall I invite men?"

"I am just as happy," Antonia said, "with only you and me."

"*That*," Charlotte Earle said, "should make you very serious indeed."

"It's not the house—," Antonia said.

"Why not? It makes *me* serious—very serious."

"I don't believe you really dislike it so much."

"*You* transform it."

"I can't think of any other place I'd rather be."

Antonia could think of some other places that she had been about which she could not have said as much. And now she was on her own.

When you looked around you, Dublin alone of the capitals was the least endangered of the great cities where she might have found herself living. No matter what one's sympathies were, you shuddered at the excesses and extremes of Paris. Her own feelings of independence and equality could not overcome the horror of the guillotine and the rivers of blood that flowed from its sharp blade. Aristocrats or not, royalty (of which she had scant sympathy), or not, who deserved to have his (her) throat cut over a difference in politics?

No, she could not return to Paris while its streets ran red. London? There was the prediction that England and France would face each other soon in conflict, and that either country could be expected to be invaded any night, any day. This troubled Irish land, then, with its night riders and underground conspirators, was yet the more peaceful of Europe's nations.

Not that Antonia demanded peace or pursued it, although she hated war. She would have led her own uprising, if there were men to follow a woman into the struggle, because she opposed injustice with the same flaming spirit that turned her into an enemy of war. Only far-away America offered promise of an-

other kind but that, Antonia told herself, would be desertion. She owed it to those like herself to stay in Ireland and resist.

And so she pledged herself to remain and perish, if necessary, in this green land where—looking out of Charlotte Earle's severe windows—your eyes could see nothing but the young trunks of stout trees, the solid, native turf, the marvelous flowers that effortlessly grew beneath the forbidding sky, and the riding-trails that led ahead into the bogs beyond and the peat-lands.

But Antonia refused resolutely to dwell on the past, an acknowledgement that there *was* a past—a grievous one for anyone, especially a girl, a young woman—to dwell upon. About her laughing parents and their lives she refused to think at all. (Sometimes, toward dawn in her sleep, she was visited by one or the other, and they would be toward her as they had been before their accident, and she would awaken still with the pleasure of their nearness warming her heart.)

"Promise me you will stay."

"My darling Lottie—"

"That's not a promise."

"I'm poor company at times."

"If anyone else told me that about you," Charlotte Earle stated, "I should accuse them of willful misrepresentation."

"I'm looking forward to this," Antonia confessed.

"We can always go into Dublin. I know dozens of amusing people there. And we can come back here," Lady Earle said, "to rest."

"How delightful."

"Remember, though. It will not be like Dublin."

"How delightful!" Antonia repeated. "Even the

sky looks very different here—closer to us—to the earth—richer—brighter—more radiant. In the city—in Dublin—you don't even look at the sky. Who sees a patch of green there—except in St. Stephen's—or a star, or the moon rising, or—"

"And you *want* to stay."

"We have a great deal to talk about, Lottie darling."

"A great deal. I'll not question you, girl. You can tell me what you choose."

"I'll keep nothing from you." Antonia added: "What is there to a girl of twenty-three? An Irish maiden of twenty-three? A Parisian girl—that would be something very different. In France you could have lived your whole life by the age of twenty-three." She gave a shiver, as though from a chill.

"You must not think thoughts like that."

"I don't usually. Usually I'm as frivolous as a Frenchwoman—and then, suddenly, I'm as-sober as a bishop. I warned you," Antonia said, lightly.

"You must meet people. I shall have all my friends in. You will pick and choose among them and make new friends for yourself. I shan't be jealous," Charlotte said, sadly, "if you like your new friends best. You can stay here and keep me from losing myself in myself."

"My darling Lottie—as if there could be anybody as close to me as you."

"One day there will be, of course—"

"No, darling. Oh, no, no, no, no, no—"

"Some young man—"

"I feel older," Antonia said, "than any young man I've met. Poor creatures. They couldn't drop me fast enough."

"Do you know what *I* think, my dear?" As An-

tonia looked questioning. "*I* think you are being unkind—most unfair. You are talking about my dearest friend—*you*—and I want to defend you. There was Charles Carney at the Ball. He acted captivated. And there were others. Wildhearne—"

"—who vanished early in the evening, and whom I have not seen again," Antonia said, "since that memorable night."

"If you will just look out the window," her friend directed, "you might."

—XII—

It was Wildhearne on horseback. The two women could watch him ride up to the house, then dismount and slap his horse on the rump. As for the animal, Antonia, looking out, could not take her eyes off the sleek mare.

It was a big, vigorous, muscular chestnut and it paused in front of their eyes, with the intent, Antonia thought, of being admired by the two sets of eyes that its instincts—female and animal—told it were watching.

The creature lounged tamely in the sunlight, snuffling the ground and biting into the first patch of grass it came across. It raised its head to look up at the windows, it seemed, then went back to its grazing.

Antonia breathed, "I should love to ride her."

"Wildhearne, I'm sure," Lady Earle told her, "won't mind."

"Men are very possessive about their horses, I know."

"Shall we put it to Wildhearne now?" Antonia's friend Charlotte inquired.

A serving-girl was leading that gentleman in. Wildhearne overheard his name, but not the remark that occasioned it. He came into the presence of the two woman, registering a surprise that he did not feel, and professing regrets that Lady Charlotte did not credit.

He greeted Lady Earle in the correct fashion, she remained composed enough to observe. "Poor Columbine," Wildhearne explained, "she picked up a stone, I'm afraid. She limped for awhile and I decided to take advantage of our friendship and your stables. But now she appears all right," he told them. "And I may have perhaps been mistaken—"

"We shall have Norris examine her." Lady Earle added: "I never see him do anything around the stables—. I've discovered him with one of the girls from the kitchen, which he may think he is employed for. Perhaps he can look at Columbine's shoe for you. Unless he's lost whatever he knew about horses to his peccadillos." She directed the girl, who had lingered for her instructions, "Have Norris take Mister Lancing's horse to the stables. Tell him he is to look out for something in her hoofs. And don't stay down there to look with him—devoted as I know you to be to horses." The girl went off quickly, her reply to Lady Earle barely audible as she fled.

"I had not the faintest idea you were entertaining today," Wildhearne said.

"Miss Desmond," Lady Earle told him, "is staying at Copsley."

"I hope," Wildhearne said, turning to Antonia, "for a long time."

"That will be up to Miss Desmond," Charlotte Earle replied. "She can stay for as long as she can stand the house."

"Lottie *will* say the most desperate things about this splendorous old place. I love old houses—old places—old letters and books and—"

"Old people," her friend interrupted. "I only pray I'm not too old for some of that love."

"Lady Charlotte is the least old of any Irish man or

woman in the county. For that matter," Wildhearne added, "in the country." She could ride to hounds tomorrow if she were inclined to. I, myself, find it increasingly exhausting—but after a full day of it she's ready for supper and a ball in the evening. But I *do* hope she is right," he said to Antonia, "about your staying here for as long as you like."

"She is not as old as she pretends—and not the oldest of my friends. But," the girl told Wildhearne, "she *is* the most generous."

"I am proud," Wildhearne stated, "that she is *my* friend, too."

"Those are sentiments we speak over the dead. I shall listen to no more of them," Lady Earle protested.

"Not all the dead deserve them," Wildhearne said. Then, to Antonia: "*Will* you stay, then?" It sounded to her ears like an invitation.

"I am known for my attachments," Antonia answered. "Once in a place that I love there's no way of dislodging me—except through a failure of love. And so I—"

"A failure of love?" Wildhearne repeated, thoughtfully. He had remained standing, perhaps because, between the two women, he was a virile and striking figure. He was carefully—even richly—dressed, with lace jabot and ruffles beneath the fine coat, and wearing high-top boots and riding breeches.

A ride through the countryside, Antonia thought, slyly, was not a matter for careless attire. Wildhearne Lancing was as scrupulous about his appearance on the back of a horse as he appeared to be at the ball, where Antonia had been introduced to him.

"You sound," Antonia accused, "as though you

disbelieved in the phrase."

"It is an unusual combination of words. Wouldn't you say so, Lady Charlotte?"

"Not to anyone who has lived it," Charlotte Earle said.

"I'd never have thought to apply the words to you," Wildhearne told Lady Earle, "or to you," he said to Antonia. "We commoner mortals—"

"Surely," Antonia put in, out of mischief, "you have known no failures?"

In his riding clothes and rich boots, and with Columbine waiting in the stable to carry him on her back to magnificent Lislaughton, Wildhearne could not easily be perceived as a man intimately familiar with failure.

"I? Failure," Wildhearne said, "is the human lot. Why should it have been different with me?"

"I am indeed sorry to hear that."

"Wildhearne's failures are most men's successes. Failure is not a condition that he would tolerate for long. I doubt if it would ever confront Wildhearne Lancing and dare to impose itself. It would be ridden down," Lady Earle asserted, "forthwith."

They laughed at that, the two women. Wildhearne, Antonia noted, did not change expression. He looked as serious as a boy. She could not remember if she had seen him smile, though she met him at a ball. Seriousness was something that won universal respect.

Antonia wondered if that were the reason he neither laughed nor even smiled, whatever the reasons for it might exist. She attempted to mold her expression, but it was playful rather than earnest, with a current of mischief that translated itself into an active presence between them.

She was not a vain girl. But she was conscious of herself in the muslin frock she had selected that morning, with a wide blue sash gracefully encircling her slim waist, and the smart, cross-over fichu into which, at her breast, she had fastened a few, late crimson roses.

Wildhearne looked at her, she saw (she could not help seeing) as a man does. Antonia met his eyes with her own clear, girlish ones. She was not taken in—he could see that she was not—taken in by the stone in Columbine's shoe.

For Wildhearne Lancing, Antonia knew, would never have left Lislaughton without a reason that he could recite to himself or to anyone who questioned him. He had simply got upon his horse and ridden to Copsley to see Antonia again, and if he were forced to tell a lie to accomplish so pleasant a purpose, he would not be phased by it.

In his riding clothes and boots and tailored jacket he looked the carefully-bred gentleman certain of himself and his position, not only in the county, but in the world itself, not confined alone to Ireland.

"Is Miss Desmond enjoying her visit?" Wildhearne inquired, gravely.

"Miss Desmond is very, very happy with her visit," Antonia assured him. "I would be," she added, "no matter where I was—so long as I am with someone I love."

"I see. Is that a condition of your visit?" he inquired.

"Is what a condition, Mister Lancing?"

"That you must be with someone you love."

"It is something I prefer—yes," Antonia answered.

"Are you staying to tea?" Lady Earle asked, but

he did not appear to hear her question. How else would he have not replied to the lady, a breach of deportment that a gentlemen of Wildhearne's stature surely would never have perpetrated.

"Then I suppose you cannot be induced to visit Lislaughton," he said, tentatively.

"Is the gentleman staying for tea?" the serving girl inquired, entering quietly, as all the help had been carefully trained by Lady Earle to do. She had no patience with noise or—as she often put it to her servants—boisterous Irish behavior. She was an adoring friend, a restless and generous friend and a hard task-mistress. She was proud that her girls were considered highly desirable and were frequently tempted away by higher wages than she thought it necessary to pay.

"Wildhearne?" Lady Earle inquired, as he paused at the interruption.

"Thank you." The girl withdrew for the tea and momentarily a silence descended upon the three of them.

Wildhearne was facing Antonia, and Lady Earle, in her comfortable, somewhat unfashionable, chair could encompass the two young people without being within range of their vision. They looked handsome together, Lady Earle remarked. She felt a little sorry for Wildhearne. She knew her friend and sympathised with, and partly deplored, her high demands, and the ruthless views that Antonia maintained toward men.

"Are you inviting us to Lislaughton, Wildhearne?" Lady Earle inquired with the bluntness that she was noted for.

"Invite—do I have to *invite* you to Lislaughton, Lady Charlotte?" Wildhearne demanded. "Do I

need to be invited to Copsley? Lady Earle," Wildhearne told Antonia, "has the run of all the county homes around here—she knows Copsley as well as I do." He looked at Antonia. "You must join her."

"You don't know me," Antonia reminded him.

"Nor you me. That will be the beauty of it."

"If that is the beauty of it, what," she wanted to know, "would you call knowing each other?"

It opened his eyes. Antonia saw them widen at her words, her mischievous question. Already in her eyes he had become the conventional gentleman, the squire aping English ways, the riding boots and riding breeches, the hounds and the hunting rifle.

Wildhearne Lancing, Antonia decided, was as much the county gentleman paying silent allegiance to the crown as he was the Irishman against whom the British had perpetrated their unpardonable (to Antonia) acts.

That was unpardonable, she thought. That Irishmen would suppress and even betray the Irish in their natures.

At the same time Antonia noted that his eyes were startling to her, singular in ways that she had not been confronted by. Their color was deep and somewhat distracting, so that having them in your line of vision—as she had—was momentarily disquieting. They were of a clear blue that intensified in the high afternoon light that filled the room—Charlotte's room, Antonia thought.

But her thoughts scattered themselves now. And Antonia was grateful when Lady Earle got up and started for the door.

"I must go and see about the tea myself. Those girls have no sense of time." (It was that her own was

so acute. She always thought that she was being kept waiting longer than she could bear.)

"I shall have to be going," Wildhearne announced to the room with only one person—besides himself—in it.

"Will your horse be ready?" Antonia inquired, politely. Her voice sounded artificial in the vacancy created by Lady Charlotte's leaving.

"She must be all right," Wildhearne said. "She had stopped limping by the time we reached here." He consulted his watch and shook his head. "Time passes so deliciously here at Copsley," he remarked.

Antonia could not help herself. "How does it pass," she innocently inquired, "at Lislaughton?" It was mischief on Antonia's part, pure mischief. Yet it could cause a man to misunderstand.

"You must find that out for yourself, Miss Desmond," Wildhearne told her.

It had been the word "deliciously" that made Antonia want to wound him. It was, she decided, outrageously English—British-squire-ish of Wildhearne Lancing to give the term equal standing in his speech with pure Irish expressions.

"I believe tea will be here. Lottie will be disappointed if you leave so soon." That, at least, was the truth. Antonia's friend, Charlotte, loved Wildhearne, Antonia perceived, loyally and blindly, extravagantly, as Antonia herself wished to be loved. "Besides, your horse will probably welcome the rest."

"Like her master," Wildhearne smiled, "she is relieved in the end to be home. I am sure," he added, at something in Antonia's expression, "you must share my sentiments."

"About what, Mister Lancing?"

"About home, Miss Desmond."

"I would, I suppose," she answered, "If I had one."

"A home?" he repeated, surprised. "You have no home?"

"I am uprooted," she said. "I can't go into the story. I know it too well and—I won't go into it. Besides, Mister Lancing you haven't the time—"

"There are no demands on my time," he protested.

"I believed someone was expecting you."

"I make my own time," he assured Antonia.

"How admirable."

"Besides," he told her, "there is nothing at home to equal the attractions of this place."

"Copsley? Copsley *is* beautiful," she murmured.

Just then Lady Earle re-entered the room. "Beautiful?" she echoed. "Copsley beautiful?" Lady Charlotte repeated in her husky, warm voice, which sounded like a man's when overheard in another room. "my poor Tony. You must really have been deprived in the past few years—"

Antonia laughed. "It's our only disagreement," she told Wildhearne.

Wildhearne smiled at the sound. It changed his features, she noted. He looked suddenly very attractive, even handsome, Antonia remarked. Wildhearne looked deeply at Antonia and either because of that look or the thought that flashed through her mind and stirred her pulses, she felt her cheeks warm and she knew she had given herself away.

"At last!" Charlotte exclaimed, and rubbed her palms together. "Tea!"

—XIII—

After that visit Wildhearne came again and again to Copsley. He did not use the excuse of his horse after that, nor did he disguise it as calls upon Lady Charlotte. It was clear—it was made clear—that he was visiting—not his dear old friend—but Antonia. They walked in the park outside Copsley. He took her riding.

It had been a long time since Antonia had been on a horse. Lady Charlotte's stable provided her with a gentle white mare called Clover and Antonia found herself excellently attuned to the creature's easy gallop. She and Wildhearne trotted together far from the old house—in the distance it *did* look splendid, and rather mysterious, she decided—along the clear pond toward the imaginary line of the horizon that appeared to be so close here in the country, and which one saw in the city not at all.

Slowing their horses and riding side by side they talked in a more natural way than when they were seated opposite each other at Copsley making conversation.

"I shall miss all this," Antonia told Wildhearne, "when it's time to go."

"You must not talk in such a way," Wildhearne protested.

"Nevertheless," she said, "I feel guilty at enjoy-

ing all this—when I have no right to.”

“I cannot see what purpose it serves,” he objected, “to think such thoughts.”

“Do you never feel guilty?” she asked, impulsively.

He looked startled, Antonia saw.

“Guilty?” he repeated.

“Forgive me,” she appealed, in confusion. “I—”

“Forgive you? Forgive you—?”

“I have no right to question you that way,” Antonia said, humbly.

“If you think that I should—”

“No—. No—,” Antonia disclaimed

“—feel quilty? Do you think that I should?”

Antonia tried to banish it? “I shouldn’t have—. Please try to forget what I said—”

“Nevertheless—”

“I didn’t know what I was saying—”

“My dear Miss Desmond—”

“Mister Lancing, I asked you to forgive me.” Antonia touched Clover lightly and the small mare jogged a little faster, carrying Antonia’s light weight beyond Wildhearne on the slower Columbine. Wildhearne increased the horse’s speed and caught up to Antonia.

“Why did you say that?”

“I admitted that I shouldn’t have—”

Antonia was flushed, she knew, and not at all because of the riding. Her cheeks felt warm, as though she had a fever, and she reproached herself because she had recklessly.

“I was thinking only of myself,” she said.

“Why *should* you feel quilty?” he pursued, stubbornly.

“Ireland needs me. Here I am,” Antonia said, and

gestured, "living a life of luxury in the country while all around us there is so much heartbreak and misery. I feel guilty," Antonia continued, "every moment that I don't feel angry at conditions. And I *can't* feel angry here—with Lottie—and Copsley—here I am," she repeated, "riding under these lovely beeches alongside this beautiful pond, with the colors of the country so green that it is almost like looking at jewels to be exposed to them—. Oh, I am weak. I should like these days and nights to go on like this—just like this—forever, and yet—. How weak of me!" she laughed at herself, and her earnestness. "I really have no character. I ought to be back in Dublin doing something for Ireland."

"What is there to be done for Ireland?" Wildhearne wanted to know.

"It can't go on like this."

"It's gone on for centuries," Wildhearne reminded her, "more or less like this.

"The suffering—. It must stop."

"Oh, suffering—"

"Have you," she asked, "no heart?"

"If I could stop it," Wildhearne said, "I would."

She looked at him, doubtful whether he meant it. Antonia had called herself weak because she succumbed so wholly to the luxury and ease of dear, remote, hospitable Copsley. He was right, of course, Wildhearne and every gentleman like him in the country. Why should a Lancing stir himself for the inert, hopeless, helpless—yes, ignorant—mass of suffering Ireland? The Irish had stored up suffering for the centuries of their meagre existence. Now they were being scourged by it, and there was no protection. Who could protect them? The hopeless, like themselves?

"Shall we go back?" Antonia started to turn Clover's head. The horse resisted, but only tamely. She had a will of her own—she demonstrated that she did not now care to return to the stall—but then she relinquished the struggle. It reminded Antonia of Ireland. Another symbol of Ireland.

Wildhearne extended a gloved hand and gripped the bridle. "Even the horse doesn't want it to end so soon," he murmured. "Lady Charlotte won't be expecting you—"

"I'm visiting her. She will be lonely."

"Does that make you guilty, too?"

"I'm sorry I talked that way," Antonia apologized. "You don't have to pay any attention to it."

"On the contrary. I want to talk further about it."

"I've said all I feel about it the subject. And I told you—I'm very sorry I did," she said.

"What you said to me was disturbing."

"I'm sorry."

"You seemed to think I owed something to Ireland. That I ought to be doing something I am not doing now. What is it?"

"I hardly know you—or anything about you. It was presumptuous of me to think of you as otherwise—"

"Just how *did* you think of me?"

"We ought to go back. It is sure to rain."

"It usually does rain. The crops depend upon it. So does the vegetation. Ireland is the better for a drenching—and so are the Irish. They will eat better. You see," he reminded her, "I *am* concerned about our countrymen."

"Yes. You're a good man. I know."

"You thought otherwise a minute ago."

The two horses had stopped and they were now close together, dancing a little on their hard shoes, kicking at the turf beneath them and nuzzling each other the way horses do when they are making—or renewing—acquaintance.

It brought Wildhearne and Antonia nearer to each other in their saddles, and caused Antonia an undercurrent of confusion that she sought to conceal.

She tried not to look into his eyes, and found herself looking into her eyes, which were disturbingly seeking hers. She slapped Clover, who moved a few feet forward and stopped again, and looked back at Columbine.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“You said that already.”

“Because I am doubly sorry,” Antonia laughed. “That’s why I’d better go back. I may blurt something that I’ll have to say I’m sorry for again.”

“I must have distressed you. Something about me—”

“No. No. Something about *me*. I think I am a more than usually childish girl,” she said, “today.”

“I do not see it,” he protested.

“You must be a very saint among men,” Antonia said.

“That was not what you had in mind, I think.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she told him. “I was probably wrong. I’ve been away from Ireland—that’s probably why my guilt is so sharp. I felt as though I’d been deserting. I wanted to get back to Ireland to—to—to help it—”

“How can Ireland be helped?”

“I thought a man would know,” she said, “and be able to *tell* me.”

“Its’ troubles have always been extreme.”

"Its' beauty, too."

"You think Ireland beautiful?"

"Don't you?" Antonia asked.

"I am trying to see it the way *you* see it," he told her.

"How do *you* see Ireland?" Antonia wanted to know.

"It is a subject that does not attract me," Wildhearne said.

"Yes. I was right. I thought that about you," Antonia remarked.

"Ask me—"

But Antonia interrupted him. "*We must* be getting back—"

"Ask me," he repeated, "how I see *you*."

"We should have taken Lottie with us. I hate her being all alone there."

"Charlotte hates riding and any kind of outdoor activity. She loathes the rain and it will surely rain—it usually does. And she'll be that much happier—the longer you stay away—to see you come trotting back."

"You know women extremely well, Mister Lancing."

"They're a fascinating study."

"I understood you to be a brilliant student."

"If," he told her, "you speak to my friends—"

"Lady Charlotte—as you call her—certainly counts herself as one—"

"A woman—or a friend—?"

"Do you make distinctions?"

"When they are under my eyes," Wildhearne said.

"I would have thought you indifferent," Antonia said.

"I am not blind to everything," Wildhearne stated.

“Except to the problems of Ireland.”

He looked up at the rain clouds. This time he turned Columbine back toward Copsley. “Sometimes the heart drowns in its own blood,” Wildhearne told Antonia. “Ireland is something like that.”

—XIV—

There were always balls and other events in the houses around Copsley—lawn parties, hunt breakfasts, the pursuit of the fox, and even a picnic, if the weather looked to be dependable for a full afternoon. One or another of Charlotte's friends in their nearby manors, or her closest neighbors, would send a man with an announcement and Antonia and Charlotte would smilingly consent to be received of an afternoon.

Charlotte loved such invitations, since Copsley itself made her restive. Although Antonia found its interior individual, rustic and admirable, Charlotte professed to find nothing agreeable about it, and she turned her back upon it—and upon its solid planes and rectangles and singular lines and weathered old woods—with a sigh always of pleasure and relief.

And Charlotte was always proud to take her youthful friend with her into some new world where Antonia's astonishing looks and presence had not yet been experienced. The ladies present would soon come together and Charlotte was mischievous enough to derive enjoyment from the sight and to laugh to herself as she saw their lips moving in a manner that conveyed something like inner tumult.

Lady Earle particularly like Antonia's effect upon men, which was usually instantaneous and altogether

different from that of the ladies. The men would experience her privately—stealthily—sharing her with no one. And whereas the ladies discussed her agitatedly with the other ladies present, men disguised their response to her and talked of her not at all. Charlotte possessed the vision to penetrate the very spirit itself of the gentlemen made captive in the moment of their exposure to the radiant Antonia, who dazzled their eyes like the fullness of the sun. Lady Earle was able to sympathize with them at the same moment that their stunned demeanor set her shoulders to shaking with mordant laughter.

“Are you Irish?” Miles Dunnigan demanded, as he danced Antonia around the floor before the eyes of all the others. It was his house. He had given the evening and invited Charlotte with instructions to bring Antonia. (Charlotte would have consented to go nowhere without her.) “Have you been in Ireland until now?”

“I intend to stay,” she told Mister Dunnigan evasively.

“But—but—but—.” The dance ended, the host was forced to relinquish her, and Antonia was at once taken up by quite the tallest Irishman she had ever encountered. He was six-feet-three, he had eyes so brown that they appeared to be black and hair so curled that ladies were frequently envious.

“Are you staying at the Dunnigans?” he wanted to know. So far, men spoke to Antonia only in questions.

“You must be Mister Hanna,” she prompted.

“And you are Miss Desmond. You’re at Copsley—with Lady Earle. You’ve been there a fortnight. Will you stay at the Dunnigans?” he repeated.

"The Dunnigans haven't asked me," Antonia responded, lightly, enjoying the attention

"He's a fool," Mister Hanna said, "if he doesn't."

"We can't leave Copsley unattended," Antonia pointed out.

"She's got a houseful of servants," Hanna growled. Antonia wondered if he were a high-tempered man, such as Ireland habitually generates, and which has been part of the cross that history has forced upon the helpless Irish. "The house will be allright. Why not stay here?"

She could not think of an answer that was not solemn (when she was feeling witty) and discouraging. Antonia wanted to discourage nothing, and so she danced languidly to a familiar Irish song, sad as always under its melodious lilt.

Hanna was silent, too, waiting for the sound of her voice, perhaps, and aching in his limbs with the light burden in his arms. The dance ended this way, with Hanna speechless and Antonia absently aware that she owed the gentleman a reply to words uttered to her under the pressure of kindness and masculine interest.

But the music had taken over and had caused her almost to cry. The tears ventured up and then—like the gentle, uninsistent, Irish rain—had receded. So that she could smile upon the man who presented himself before her now.

Sometimes Antonia was able to detect at once if a partner could not dance, without having to put him to the trying test. Antonia was able to determine this now, before the gentleman wrapped both arms around her—as though he were bearing her up, as without his aid she might fall—and leaned his muscled body securely against hers. He appeared to have

as little sense of the music as he had of direction, and to Antonia's discomfiture and embarrassment, they collided with several other dancing couples and created a little eddy of confusion on their strip of floor. Antonia's cheeks were crimson but not out of sheer high spirits.

"Do you dance often?" she gasped, and could have bitten her tongue, since to her own ears the words sounded reproachful.

"You are Miss Desmond," her partner said, in a pleasant voice. "My name is Desmond, too. Jonathan Desmond. I hope we are not related."

Antonia laughed aloud, despite having her toes stepped on and being crowded up against other dancing couples.

"If you put it *that* way, sir—," she said.

He reddened at her words, aware all at once of the sense of his own. "I only meant—," he apologized, "that—that— that—you were so—so—so—." He seemed constitutionally unable to complete a sentence.

"I was watching you," he confessed. "I *had* to dance with you," he said. "I hope you don't—. Do you? *Do* you?"

Antonia murmured something appropriate, or hoped it was.

"I have no living relatives in Ireland," Antonia told Jonathan Desmond. "Still, I don't see that if we *were* related why it should make such a difference to you."

He looked longingly into the depths of her eyes, their color unfathomable now in the shadowy glamor of the dance floor. She felt his arms twitch spasmodically.

"Oh, it would make a difference," he said. "It

would make such a difference," and he clasped her, and steered her—or tried to steer her—off to the side of the room where the other couples had left a pocket of space. Antonia felt her body resistant to the masculine force of the man's dubious efforts.

It was not so much Jonathan Desmond's words as his desperate acts that finally illuminated—for Antonia—the sense of what her partner meant by what he had said. The meaning was conveyed in his strong pressure against her. She hoped the music would end forever. This member of the Desmond tribe—one with which she was unfamiliar—caused her some unease. It did end and Antonia sought to excuse herself and join her friend, Charlotte.

"You must pardon me now—," she appealed, in a low voice.

"May I have the next dance?" Jonathan Desmond implored.

"It's been promised, I'm afraid," Antonia lied. She had no alternative but to lie as gracefully and as persuasively as she was able to. In moments the music would start up again and Antonia would find herself once more trapped with a Desmond she hoped had no branches on her family tree. "Please forgive me."

"My dear!" It was Charlotte's voice, Antonia was aware, with relief. "Over here, my child. Over here!"

Antonia dutifully, with a quick, modest, deprecating glance in the direction of her partner, escaped and traced her steps back to where Charlotte waited for her. Charlotte had a glass of punch in her pale, stubby hand. "What *was* that man proposing? I can read lips, my dear, but I forbore to. I didn't have to read yours. I saw the whole episode in your face. As for

him—”

“He’s a Desmond.” Antonia gave a shudder.
“Though not a Desmond related to *me*.”

“Never mind, dear Tony. There will be another man along shortly. That’s a safe prediction, my dear. If some of these gentlemen’s wives were not at their sides tonight—”

“Lottie!”

“We here in the country are no different from those in the wicked city. Men easily forget their wives for the stimulation of the minute—or the evening. I predicted when I brought you here tonight that there would be a stir on the part of the males. Well, you haven’t been off the dance floor. And I’ve been literally talking to myself.”

“I’ll spend the rest of the evening with you. I promise.”

“You will be forced to break that promise,” Lady Charlotte predicted, “long before the evening is out.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“I mean,” her friend enlightened her, “That I just now saw Wildhearne come in. Better late,” she murmured, “than never ”

Antonia had looked around the room repeatedly—sometimes over the shoulders of the man she was dancing with—and had earlier noted Wildhearne's absence. Now she disdained following the direction of Charlotte's glance. Antonia did not look up until Wildhearne had approached to within about two feet of them, and then she included his presence as though she had already seen him throughout the evening and they had had conversation.

"I was saying to Lottie just now," Antonia remarked, glancing up at Wildhearne's resolute approach, "that I truly had no idea of what I missed—not living in the country. Is it always this way? Do you always have such exciting evenings? How do you get out of bed as early as you must—to hunt the fox the next morning?"

"My dear," her friend Lottie laughed, "the Irish gentry are tireless. We possess the strongest constitutions in the universe—we are famous for it. Isn't that true, Wildhearne?"

"The dance is about to start," Wildhearne told Antonia. "Will you be my partner?"

"Wildhearne—dear boy!" Lady Earle protested, in good humor.

"I am sorry, Lady Charlotte," Wildhearne apologized, sincerely enough. "It was uncivilized of me—coming in on you this way—will you forgive me?" He turned again unsmilingly to Antonia. "Will you dance with me?"

"The poor dear has been forced to dance every dance. Won't you men have pity on the girl? She has earned a little rest," Lady Earle insisted.

"I am very much afraid that my last dance," Antonia said, "may *be* my last dance. I think I am crippled."

"Mister Desmond," Lady Charlotte explained, "is much better in a stable than on the dance floor."

"Mister *Desmond*?" Wildhearne repeated.

"No relation," Antonia said, and saved herself from adding, thank God.

"What a great pity," Lady Earle said. "He is very rich."

"Unlike all the Desmonds known to me, and my family," Antonia sighed. "If only *one* of them had been—"

"In that case," Wildhearne interjected, "may I sit through the dance with you?"

"If you don't mind the company of an interested third party," Lady Charlotte warned.

"I shall imagine that I am out on the floor, and that we are dancing rather than talking," Antonia said.

"If you like."

"What an hour to show up at a party, Wildhearne," Lady Charlotte lovingly twitted him, although she knew that the higher country gentry—that included herself—went nowhere before ten and were known for their tardy ways; so that hostesses were forced to invite whom they will and instruct them to arrive early for the buffet if their evenings were not to subside dismally, like a collapsed soufflé."

"I was eager to get here," Wildhearne said, "even before the dancing started."

"Just when I've been talking to Lottie about

leaving—,” Antonia said, and contrived a yawn that was far from expressing her. Her eyes were bright and dancing, and her creamy flesh a becoming crimson.

“Why, Tony, I—you—.” But her friend Lottie’s words drowned in the splutter that Antonia’s remark brought forth from Wildhearne.

“Leaving?” Wildhearne stormed. “You can’t mean that you are thinking of leaving—”

“It *is* late.”

“But I’ve only just got here.”

“Then, of course, you must stay. Mustn’t you?” the young woman said, innocently.

“You really *cannot* be thinking of leaving now,” Wildhearne insisted.

“I am thinking of Lottie as much as myself,” the sly creature said, shamelessly. She did not dare to look at Charlotte.

“Far from being late,” Wildhearne told her, “I managed to get here earlier than is my habit—”

“In Dublin we have different habits,” Antonia sighed. “I simply cannot get used to country ways.”

“Talk to her, Lady Charlotte.”

“Oh, young people don’t listen to anyone of my years,” Lady Charlotte said, “in this age.”

“Charlotte is tireless. I haven’t been able to keep up with her,” Antonia said.

“But—who shall I dance with—?” Wildhearne demanded.

“I *am* sorry,” Antonia said, without looking it in the least.

“Sorry—. Sorry—?” Wildhearne’s voice was rising. He lowered his tone when he observed that he was attracting stares.

“I told you that Tony has been almost exhausted

by those demanding men. Perhaps next time we shall make them pay—we could finance a new charitable venture with such proceeds,” Lady Charlotte observed.

“When shall I see you again?” Wildhearne inquired.

“You are welcome any time to Copsley—I am sure Lottie will enjoy your visits just as much as I do.”

“But what about now?”

As though she had overheard him, the hostess—a dark-haired, sparkling beauty with full, red lips and red cheeks—arrived at his side. “My dear Mister Lancing,” she said, stopped by his voice in her tracks, “I have someone just for you—,” and she took Wildhearne’s arm and wouldn’t relinquish it.

“My dear Mistress Brody,” Wildhearne protested. “I have no wish to-to—.” He was forced to explain, “I have this dance with Miss Desmond. Miss Desmond preferred to sit and I-I—.” Miss Desmond, behind Wildhearne’s agitated back, smiled with mischief at Lady Charlotte. Facing Wildhearne, Lady Charlotte managed to maintain a straight face.

“Then I leave Mister Lancing to Miss Desmond,” the hostess said, and let him go. “She can assuage him—I have no doubt.” And she was off again, impish, flattering, and desperate, hostess-style, to keep her party afloat.

“She cannot leave you to me, dear Mister Lancing,” Antonia said, “and since Lottie is coming with me, you cannot remain with *her*—. Don’t you think you ought to let her furnish you with a substitute?” Antonia was smiling sweetly at the severity of his expression.

“It is early. Wildhearne can ride back with us—to

protect us—”

Wildhearne looked startled. “Protect you—”

“Yes. What nonsense. *I* am afraid of nothing. It’s my servants. I have had to put extra locks on. I am told that nobody is safe now in their country houses since those firebrands have learned to raid and steal. My servants talk about leaving from day to day. When there’s a raid on one of the country houses, their bags are packed and out in the passage and I am forced to raise their pay to keep them from escaping. It’s a little like the French Revolution—”

“It is said that a gentleman leads them,” Antonia said.

“Romantic nonsense,” Wildhearne dismissed it.

“Captain Carney thinks there may be a revolution,” Antonia volunteered.”

“Captain Carney is an imbecile,” Wildhearne stated, matter-of-factly.

“*Is* he?” Lady Earle asked, with interest. “I have always found Charles Carney to be a rare gentleman, and very sound—for a soldier.”

“And very attractive,” Antonia murmured.

“Yes. The ladies do appear to agree,” Lady Charlotte said. “It is a wonder that he has managed to remain free.”

“And he is most discreet,” Antonia observed, perhaps because it outraged Wildhearne to hear Captain Carney praised in his male presence.

“I find the whole subject of Captain Carney,” Wildhearne observed, “an odd one for a dance.”

“What should we talk about that is more suitable?” Antonia wanted to know.

“At a dance,” Wildhearne said, “we should be dancing.”

“The music started some time ago,” Antonia

pointed out, a little wickedly.

"I am sorely aware of it," he admitted.

He looked even to her eyes sufficiently unhappy, Antonia thought. His expressive features betrayed a proud man's restless feelings, the emotions that fought themselves out in full view of the onlooker upon his handsome, deceptively delicate face molded to its present elegance by centuries of noble Lancings and who knew how many arranged, unromantic loveless marriages.

What, Antonia wondered, had gone into that serious face that had been left out of his equally well-born brother's?

Wildhearne—the luckier one—registered all the changing emotions more readily, Antonia perceived, than most. "I shall have to say good night, Mister Lancing—"

"Good night?" Wildhearne repeated. "What kind of good night shall it be?"

Lady Charlotte volunteered, "Tonight I shall drive myself. I love taking the reins," she said. "And I love the night. At night," she said, "no one can see me—although I think the horses know when I am driving. Animals," she said, "sense things, I think. Like snow. And rain. I always listen to the sounds from the stables when I want to find out what the weather is going to be." Lady Earle stopped and looked perplexed. "The weather? Is that what I started out talking about?"

"If you like, Lottie," Antonia said.

"Your friend Lottie is getting old, my dear. I babble so. I forget what I am saying and repeat myself. Or contradict myself. What kind of a companion am I for the young?"

"If anyone else were to say that about you," An-

tonia told her, "they would lose my friendship." She turned to Wildhearne. "What do *you* say, Mister Lancing?"

"About leaving?"

"I thought," she told him, "that that had been decided."

"I had no part in the decision," he said, gloomily.

"There was no way of consulting you," Antonia pointed out.

"The best part of the evening is over anyway," Lady Charlotte observed.

"*This* is the best part," Wildhearne protested.

"When we are leaving?"

"You could very well stay," he said. "I can think of no good reason why I am here tonight—"

"You almost weren't," Antonia reminded Wildhearne, mischievously. "It's as though the affair had gone completely out of your head."

"It was forgetfulness, I assure you," Wildhearne divulged, rather unwillingly.

"Of course. There were competing attractions," Antonia smiled. "No doubt every hostess in the county sends out word that Wildhearne Lancing is expected. At the last moment, I am sure, there may be some uncertainty as to which selection he will make—and why," she added.

"There wasn't much doubt tonight," Wildhearne confessed, somberly.

"That must have been the earlier part of the evening," she said, slyly.

"I wasn't aware of any other invitations for tonight," Charlotte Earle pronounced. "They usually come to me as well as to Wildhearne—although," she added, "not for the same reasons. However, there can be exceptions. And tonight there must have

been one—”

“A very compelling one, I take it,” Antonia murmured.

“Compelling—yes,” Wildhearne reluctantly acknowledged. “But that is not to say that this—*now*—here and now—is not compelling. It is,” he emphasized, “deeply compelling.”

“It indeed must have been,” Antonia said, still mischievous, “for you to arrive at it so late.”

“I should be a wretched hostess, truly,” Lady Earle stated, “if you—Wildhearne—were to arrive at Copsley this late, when you had been expressly asked for the evening. But not being Tony here I would no doubt have swallowed my discomfiture and gone about having my guests’ glasses filled. By the way, Wildhearne, the wine is good.”

“Its’ substitute can be even better,” Wildhearne said, enigmatically.

“I do find you morose tonight, Wildhearne,” Lady Earle observed, “and not a bit like you.”

“I thought, on the contrary,” Antonia laughed, “that Mister Lancing seems very much himself tonight.”

“Perhaps,” Wildhearne said, “my spirits have been laid low by my having learned that you ladies are deserting.”

“Look around you, Mister Lancing,” Antonia directed. “You can’t help but see the numerous ladies who will be left behind to console you.”

“Console me.” He continued to look moody. Antonia felt sympathy for Wildhearne, and was fleetingly regretful now that she had committed herself and Charlotte to leave, since the hostess was thoughtful as well as beautiful, the atmosphere was warm and engaging, the men expansive and occa-

sionally witty and the ladies in their party gowns sparkling and graceful, the wine heady and the entire environment so overwhelmingly different from Copsley.

Copsley, welcome as it was to Antonia, had about it a burden of isolation that fought all Charlotte's efforts to make it seem intimate and welcoming. Antonia shook off the thought, or tried unsuccessfully to. It was disloyal, she thought, to her dear friend.

"You aren't thinking of going off by yourselves," Wildhearne objected. "Copsley is too distant. I shouldn't advise it." Although, Antonia might have reminded him, only moments ago he had been advising the ladies that it was perfectly safe.

She could not help bringing it up. "Who would there be to hinder two ladies from making their way home alone?" Antonia inquired. She was unable to prevent herself from lightly mocking Wildhearne's earnest disposition, and the flicker of his eyes informed her that he was aware of her tone, and disturbed by it.

Antonia did not admit to herself that this was her intent, but when young women adopt certain patterns of performance in the presence of a young man—although Wildhearne Lancing could not accurately be envisioned as only a young man—this behavior is open to interpretation, and the interpretation itself a matter of incitement.

If Antonia was idly mocking toward Wildhearne, Wildhearne himself appeared vulnerable and deeply serious in her company. Like Antonia, he was unable to modify his public behavior. Her mockery punctuated his seriousness and set it into relief.

"It is not safe," Wildhearne insisted. "You must know that."

"Not safe? I have lived in this county for a quarter of a century," Lady Earle reminded Wildhearne, "and have never known it to be anything but safe."

"Why? Has anything happened?" Antonia queried Wildhearne. His manner appeared to be shielding them from something ominous, and she became aware of it for the first time.

"A man was killed tonight," Wildhearne informed them.

The two women uttered an exclamation that sounded as one.

"Killed!" Antonia echoed. "How terrible!"

"Was it the Defenders? I thought you said, Wildhearne—?"

"This is not the occasion to describe such happenings," Wildhearne said, brusquely. "That's why I didn't tell you earlier. No," he replied to Lady Charlotte, "it was not the Defenders. They have not been seen near here—of course, their movements are known."

"You are trying to alarm us, Wildhearne," Lady Charlotte attempted to rally Wildhearne humourously. "You are going to great lengths," she said, "to keep me here."

"I would indeed go to great lengths to keep you here, Lady Charlotte," Wildhearne unsmilingly said. "But you may believe me—this indeed *did* occur."

"Was it an accident?" Antonia inquired.

"It was no accident," Wildhearne told her, grimly. "But it is no matter to the man who died," he added. "whether he died by accident or design."

"But who would kill him?" Lady Earle persisted.

"Men," Wildhearne told her, "as misguided as himself. Now," he said, "I have told you enough—too much—more than I had intended—"

"How shameful, Wildhearne. Excuse me," Lady Earle apologized, "but we women have a right to know things—just as you men do—"

"I have alarmed you. I didn't want to."

"Alarmed us? I have no wish to be protected like Dunstan—worse than Dustan—Dunstan is a male, and he knows what a gun is—he could be counted on to do his share to—to defend us—isn't that right?" Lady Earle demanded. "The men and male children to act like Indian braves that we hear about in America—and we ladies are the squaws to be bundled into safe-keeping—"

"That is why I kept it from you," Wildhearne said. "It's made you overwrought."

"My dear Wildhearne—"

"If we are over-wrought it's because we do not like to be treated as though we can't be let out of the nursery," Antonia said. "Only moments ago you were assuring us that the Defenders were no danger to us. Now—," Antonia accused, "—isn't that just what they do—the Defenders—shoot people down on the roads—?"

"Has Captain Carney told you that?" Wildhearne demanded.

"Captain Carney would not have minimized the danger," Antonia stated.

"If Captain Carney had been scrupulous about his duties," Wildhearne said, "perhaps this event would never have occurred."

"An event. A man's death!" Antonia reminded him.

"A passing event," Wildhearne said, "in the history of Ireland."

"Was it Ireland," Antonia wanted to know, "that fired the shot?"

"I regret that I had to be the one to inform you. It was disagreeable for me. You must know that."

"Why should there be any danger now?" Lady Charlotte wanted to know. "Is there any likelihood that the same men would come back and murder us, as well?"

"This is an abnormal time," Wildhearne said. "People don't think as they do in peacetime."

"Peacetime—is there a war? I thought Ireland *was* at peace," Lady Earle said.

"Your friend Captain Carney might have informed you differently," Wildhearne replied to Lady Earle. He added: "Please let me make amends by riding back with you to Copsley."

"And deprive half the women in the county of the pleasure of dancing with you?" Antonia said. "Indeed," she went on, "I would surely fear for my life. I shall not be the one to invite the wrath of so many of my fellow creatures. You must stay behind, Mister Lancing, and solace the ladies."

"You think me capable of doing no more?" Wildhearne wanted to know.

What else could she think of him—this pampered man, idly living in his great house that had descended to him from the great dead enriched, no doubt, by the family connections with the English? For in no other manner could an Irishman increase his wealth. She had not wanted to wound Wildhearne. He was sensitive, she could see—thin-skinned, some might put it. The aristocrats are supposedly that—the thin skin is inherited along with the bloodlines, the fortune, even perhaps, some rare disease—fortunately for him—his ancestry suffered, thereby hastening their end, and his succession.

She looked about her. They were surrounded—

Lady Earle was beside Antonia, and around them and Wildhearne there were several guests of the Brodys and the hostess herself filling the glasses and displaying her sparkling teeth—but Wildhearne spoke, Antonia knew, only for her ears alone. Such knowledge brought on a shiver that she was quite unaccustomed to, and that she found to be unexpectedly pleasurable, even desirable.

Antonia was unable to trust herself to speak.

“Goodnight, Mister Lancing,” she said, with an abruptness which she had not intended and which was not her true feelings.

“I shall make it my business to see that Tony gets back to Copsley safely, Wildhearne,” Lady Earle promised.

“I have no doubt that you will.”

“You will have nothing to concern yourself about,” she consoled him, “I promise you.”

“I shall be leaving myself, shortly,” Wildhearne said.

“When I was your age, my boy, I never left a party before the sun came up,” Lady Earle said.

“Some mornings,” Wildhearne said, “the sun does not come up at all.”

“Yes. Those were the best,” Lady Charlotte said, moving away.

“When shall I see you, then—?” Wildhearne called after her, with a humility that sat oddly with his civil accent, his composed features, his cool glance and almost chilly perfection.

“As a matter of fact,” Lady Earle said, as though it had just occurred to her, “you may call on us tomorrow. Goodnight, my dear friend,” she said, then went to excuse herself to her hostess and find Antonia, who had preceded her

When they had left the Brodys behind among the barrier of trees with their concealing leaves and limbs. Lady Charlotte climbed somewhat less than lithely up onto the box and took the reins from the driver as she liked to, smacked the horses and, with her steady arms and strong hands, guided the team uneventfully to Copsley.

"You mustn't worry, Tony," she called to her friend, who had other preoccupations for her mind to dwell on, and who was glad in her heart for the darkness and loneliness of the ride. "I'm as good a driver as old Pete here."

"'Tis' right," the driver agreed in a ridiculously tiny voice for a man who dealt with animals. "Lady Earle is the equal of inny of us."

And Antonia—seated by herself and with her own burden of thoughts and recollections—was prepared at least to credit as much to her cherished Lottie.

"As a matter of fact," Lottie said, smacking the horse's backside with relish, so that the creature grunted and roused himself unwillingly, "it was old Pete here who taught me. Wasn't it?"

"Pardon, ma'am?"

"Wasn't it you who taught me to handle a carriage horse?"

"Been in your service, ma'am, over half me life—"

Behind her, Antonia listened to their voices with a half-smile on her lips. Old Pete could not tell her much. She admired Lady Charlotte and believed that her friend could accomplish—with or without the help of her servants, male or female—whatever it was she cared to achieve. Handling a team on a dark night along a dirt road was little enough for Lottie to manage competently.

It was only when silence and darkness fell between

them that Antonia let her mind take her back to the evening and Wildhearne—his concern and his hurt. A man had been killed tonight, occupying a silence and darkness quite different—Antonia was thinking—than this through which they were serenely riding. She gave a shudder and wrapped herself more tightly in her light cloak. She hardly recognized that the shudder she had experienced was a shudder not for herself but for Ireland.

Part Two

—XVI—

It happened that the death of the man that Wildhearne had revealed was no more than an incident growing out of the quickening events in Ireland. Why was he killed? It might have been Ireland itself doing the killing, asking the question, and then swallowing the body, which was planted beneath the shamrocks and under the peat of the emerald-green land.

Ireland had become in that year—when revolution threatened—an open maw fed by men's bodies and moistened and nurtured by the blood that burst from men's wounds. Thy will be done, the Irish prayed at their masses. And God's will *was* done—the church the pious worshiped would be invaded and the worshipers attacked. If they were women they died along with their men, and sometimes they fought back with the weapons they picked up when the wounded dropped them and the dead would no longer need them.

This was a silent war, and did not yet resemble the one taking place in France, where the kings and princes and their consorts were led like the livestock so familiar to the Irish, and bled like the hogs and rabbits and fowl and pheasants that the Irish peasant dressed for the very rich.

The very rich embraced the English royal tribe and the English in their turn tolerated Ireland's worshipful gentry and even killed to make Ireland safe for them.

How does a war begin? With a killing. A man gets killed and then so does his companion. For the companion must be slaughtered, or his friend will be avenged, not only once but twice and for as long as he draws breath. The murders are compounded like interest upon the principal, and houses are reduced by fire or muscle, until what remains is a battleground—with no place to hide, and with men grouped together as in war. And when the clash comes, the innocent—should there *be* any innocent in the profane atmosphere permeated by death—are brought down along with the wicked. The war—which was real to a few—becomes a fever and a lust to those outside the field of action. Now death comes from behind. It strikes like the treacherous lightning. A man—or a woman—receives it in the back. It is called an accident, and as we know accidents are credited to God, and the will of God, and granted forgiveness.

It is war, though, and war preaches: Forgive nothing. Forgive everything, men are told, but of course only the deaths of those who are hated are readily forgivable. Once the knife is in, how easy it is to forgive the victim his helplessness, his vulnerability, his—perhaps—innocence.

Ireland was bleeding from every one of its wounds. Every country had its fighting men, its victories (usually by night) and its burials (always by night).

The English marched in uniforms the color of blood and offered the Irish fighters a target to aim at and an object to hate. Hate is longer-lasting than love, and as powerful and as exhilarating. Hate the invading English! Hate the hated Irish, who gave hospitality and support to the blood-colored English! But love Ireland, proud, helpless Ireland, Ireland too

fragile, like a pure woman, to gain power over those who would level her. Ireland, the pure woman. She calls her men to protect her. They rise to her appeal. Some call themselves the Defenders and stealthily attack in their own defence.

—XVII—

Captain Carney called upon the two women one day. It was left to Lady Charlotte, however, to greet him, when he had clearly been expecting—or anticipating—the apparition of Antonia. Lady Earle could trace the disappointment in his well-bred expression.

“Tony is out riding today,” she informed him. Captain Carney had dispatched a man to Copsley in the morning with an announcement of his presence there, and acted at once upon Lady Charlotte’s invitation that he stop by. “The poor child needs the exercise. We were rained in for almost three days. Copsley,” she told the Captain, “is wretched in a downpour.”

Captain Carney looked all around him. “Charming,” he said, absently. “Charming.”

“Yes, but haven’t you noticed its ugliness?” He must have, of course. The Captain looked merely uncomfortable. “Never mind,” she told him. “Now, I want you to tell me about all this killing.”

He looked more uncomfortable still. “I’m afraid—,” he began, but of course she interrupted, as he knew that she would.

“So am I!” Lady Charlotte said. “I haven’t been in the past. I never believed I would be. I laughed at my servants—but I bought them extra locks—and

paid dearly to have them installed. They were forever threatening to run back to Wicklow—or whatever wretched place that spawned the lazy wenches."

"You needn't be afraid."

"But *I am*—I am deathly afraid. There was a man killed here in this county, Charles, and we can find out nothing about him. What is it about, Captain?"

"Don't you know who he was?"

"That's the one thing we have been able to learn—that he was not from here—"

"Well—?"

"Do you call that re-assuring, Charles?"

"I don't know—"

"Well, *I* know—. I don't like strangers coming in here and getting killed. What are we to think?"

"I can't say, Charlotte."

"Oh, I suppose you're bound by some senseless military code or something—with people being killed—"

"It is true that we are not encouraged to give out information that may prove helpful to the adversary—"

"Do you imagine I would do such a thing, Charles?"

"No, it is possible, Charlotte, that you mightn't—"

"Possible—mightn't—What's happened to you, Charles. Or can't you give an opinion on that?"

"These are very unusual times, Charlotte."

"Isn't everything that I've said an acknowledgement of that? Of course they're unusual times. When has there been a time in Ireland that wasn't an unusual time? Charles, why did you come?"

"Today?"

"Of course. Of course, today—. Did your horse

pick up a stone?"

"A stone? Why, who told you that?"

"It does happen, Charles—"

"Poor beast," Charles Carney murmured, sympathetically.

Captain Carney hadn't come prepared to talk about such things to the ladies. He had expected to see Antonia—he had anticipated seeing Antonia, and—though his lean face did not reveal it—it was an officer's face, trained to reveal little—he was disappointed.

"I daresay there has been some killing," he conceded, reluctantly. "And not only in this county. There has been bloodshed elsewhere—"

"Where?" she demanded.

"Throughout Ireland—"

"What is happening," Lady Charlotte wanted to know, "to Ireland? Will it go the way of France?"

"Naturally," he said, "one hopes not."

"Charles—"

"I am sorry, Charlotte. I can tell you little—"

"Why did they kill the man?"

"The facts will soon come out," Captain Carney said.

"Was he a Defender? It's an outlaw organization, I understand. Oaths to be taken—secret rites, I'm told—all sorts of mystical things—perhaps drinking blood. I wouldn't be surprised. But they're devoted to Ireland—"

"The law regards them as no better than common criminals—"

"The law does."

"They steal—they help themselves to whatever they need. Horses. They frequently make off with horses. Hunting rifles—pistols. I should be very

careful to see that Copsley is well-protected. Two ladies alone in this big house—." He looked around him.

"There are servants. We are not alone, Captain."

"Ireland has had such gangs in the past," Captain Carney told her.

"Than there's no danger."

"Oh, there *is* danger. That's partly my reason for coming. You asked me why I am here—"

"No, Charles, You are always welcome at Copsley."

"I wanted to see for myself how prepared you are."

"Prepared?" she repeated. "Should we be making preparations?"

"What would you do, Charlotte," he wanted to know, "if they were to appear at your door?"

"Oh, do you think they will?" Lady Earle exclaimed, her eyes shining.

"They would be armed and ready to use their arms."

"Against Tony and me? Why in the world should they?"

"I sincerely hope there's no danger of that. But they'll want to make off with something—"

"They can steal nothing from me," she declared, "since whatever I own will be freely given."

"To be used against us," Captain Carney grimly reminded her, "at their own discretion—such as it is."

"I refuse to let myself be frightened by my own countrymen. If they are defenders, I am a defender as well. Somewhere in me there is an English inheritance but I thrill to the green of the shamrock and the bog. God save the King—I always say—from him-

self. God defend Ireland from him and from all her defenders. I am not afraid, Charles." She looked unafraid, and no one would mistake it. "I have nothing to fear from my countrymen. What they want, I want."

"You would have to know what they want," Captain Carney reminded Lady Earle.

"I would ask them that. And if they answered me to my perfect satisfaction?"

"What about Miss Desmond?"

"Tony? I'm sure Tony would be thrilled by such a diversion. The country is too dull and tame for her high spirits. There isn't even a horse in the stables to challenge her. She only stays because I want her to. Tony would be happier in Dublin. Don't tell her—please—where all the shooting is. She would only go there, and I would lose her."

"I would do nothing to bring about such a loss," Captain Carney said.

"You wouldn't, I know. But you don't know Tony—"

"No," he admitted. "I haven't had the opportunity until now."

"If I were psychic I would summon Tony back from wherever she is. I would put it into her head that she is wanted back here at Copsley. But I am helpless, Captain. Can you see anything from the window there? If she is out on the downs she may be seen from there."

Captain Carney got to his feet with relief and with alacrity. He crossed to the window and looked out for a moment, then strained forward, half-turned from the glass panes and, with considerable reluctance, returned again to his chair.

"There is nothing in sight," Captain Carney told

her, "except earth and sky." He sighed. "I envy you, Charlotte. You have all this," Captain Carney gestured, a soldier's movement: outside the window might have been the parade ground where his troops were visibly deployed. "You are most fortunate," he informed Lady Charlotte. "It's as though Ireland stretched away before your eyes. You're to be envied, my dear Charlotte."

"You didn't come all the way out to Copsley," Lady Earle said, playfully, "to tell me how lucky I am."

"Still, I thought I'd tell you."

"You had a reason, Charles. You see, I know men. And I know soldiers. And," she concluded, "I know you, Captain."

"You don't believe I've come here to see you."

"How long has it been since we saw each other in Dublin?"

The Captain threw back his head and appeared to calculate. "Six, seven weeks?" he estimated.

"That long?" Charlotte said.

"It seemed longer," Captain Carney told her, gallantly.

"Bless you, Charles."

"I remember," Charles Carney recalled, "The ball—the young lady."

Lady Charlotte clapped her palms together and rocked in her chair. "The young lady. Of course! Of course you remember the young lady. The whole male population of Ireland would remember that young lady. Tony," Lady Earle said, "has that effect upon men."

Just then the young lady herself entered the room.

Antonia was in her riding habit and looked winningly boyish and womanly at the same time. She

moved with a light step across the wide floor, and the sun—the inconstant Irish sun—struck her hair as she passed through its jeweled gleam. Suddenly it was as though the whole room glowed with its reflection.

—XVIII—

“Captain Carney!” Antonia exclaimed with delight.

“I see that you remember the Captain,” Lady Charlotte observed.

“Remember Captain Carney?” Antonia said. “How should I have forgotten?”

“It was a memorable meeting for me, too,” the Captain said.

“Why didn’t you tell us you were to be here?” Antonia asked. “I should never have been out when you came.”

“I wasn’t aware myself that I would be,” Captain Carney apologized.

“It was a military secret,” Lady Charlotte told Antonia.

“How exciting!”

“There wasn’t too much secret about it. We were sent out here on orders, it is true,” Captain Carney explained. “But there are no secrets in Ireland. And no attempt to keep one, certainly not by the Army. How do you keep a secret when more than a thousand men—Irishmen—are privy to it?”

“Still,” Lady Earle reminded the Captain, “your coming was a secret to us, Charles.”

“Military orders?” Antonia repeated and sat down across from the officer. “Is Copsley some kind of military objective?”

“I wanted to stop off at Copsley—not,” he explained, “for the sake of military objectives, but out of old—and new—,” the Captain inclined himself

toward Antonia in an ironic, courtly way, "friendship. But my men," he explained, "are detailed further on."

"Then you know about it," Lady Charlotte said.

"It's the killing. Isn't it?" Antonia asked. "You were sent here because of the killing." The girl shuddered. "Why, there's such peace, such a sunny peace when you ride through it, as I did, as I do, almost every day, that it's difficult to believe in death, especially," Antonia added, "death by violence, as happening around us here."

"We are a military force. That's for the police to determine," Captain Carney said. He looked, at that moment, like the soldier he was. His face was dark and unsmiling. His sun-tanned skin, a little leathery from outdoor exposure, gave him a slightly foreign cast.

Indeed, the Captain had spent years outside Ireland and was more at home in such places, it may be, than he was in a small provincial capital like Dublin.

"Surely the Army is concerned about the attacks taking place all through the counties," Lady Charlotte said. "People are comparing the present situations in Ireland to what is happening in France. Could what is going on in Paris," Lady Earle demanded, "also happen here?"

"Oh, Lottie!" Antonia exclaimed. There was a shiver in her voice. "You mustn't, we mustn't. How can we think like that," she pleaded, "and live?"

"It's occurring to people," Lady Charlotte said, "more and more. I want to hear Charles's opinion on it."

Charles Carney looked uncomfortable at that moment. He would have preferred, he thought, being here in this splendid sun-filled room with its paintings

and furnishings and conspicuous ease and grace, in conversation with either of the two women, so attractive each in her own way.

For most soldiers (as well as the rest of us) death was a subject to be avoided, particularly in such surroundings as these. It was all very well for Lady Charlotte to make conversation about it, but a soldier encountered it too often to regard the matter as commonplace.

Nor did he approve of killing being brought up when Antonia, who was, to the Captain, as inconstant as the Irish sun in her appearances and disappearances, was plainly being made unhappy by mention of the dismal subject.

"France?" the soldier repeated. "Paris has turned itself into a morgue, Lady Earle." When Charles Carney became formal with her, as now, it was either because something serious had been introduced or there was a matter which incited his disapproval.

"Please don't be military with me," Lady Charlotte chided him.

He gave a short laugh. "I am only trying to say," Charles Carney told her, "that I came to Copsley of my own volition. It was," he quietly insisted, "my choice and my wish. I haven't been sent here. My men are with me and we'll be on our way in just a few days, perhaps a few hours. There will be no bloodshed. I promise you."

"*You* may promise us, Charles, but what about those Defenders, or whatever they call themselves? How can you include them? Mightn't they cause bloodshed and violence? And you don't even know who they are. Do you?"

"They're not likely to tackle the Army," Captain Carney told her. "If they do," he assured her,

"they'll get their ears boxed."

"But *why* Captain?" Antonia wanted to know. "Why are they doing what they are doing—risking lives—raiding and—and now killing—. They must be very desperate men. And if they're desperate, does it matter that you're an army—and that you have more weapons than they have? And besides—"

"I'd like to know," Lady Charlotte interrupted, "just what is being done about it."

"Poor Captain Carney," Antonia sympathized. She laughed. His eyes were attracted once more to her features, and held by them. The captain lost himself for a moment in the lustrous eyes, the laughing lips. He opened his mouth, as if to reply, and then closed it. "Confronted by two militant ladies."

"Charming," Captain Carney said. "Charming."

"I see," Lady Charlotte put in, "that you are not in the mood now to deal with the question I raised."

"Will you repeat it, Lady Earle?" he requested, forgetfully.

"I certainly will not. Besides," Lady Charlotte said, "I am afraid of nothing."

"That is true, Captain Carney," Antonia affirmed. "Lottie has no fears. I tremble with them. When I heard that a man had been killed, I came home, that is, back to Copsley (it seems like home to me already) and *dreamed* about it. What kind of soldier," she said, "would I make?"

"Thank heaven the army is in no need of being reinforced by ladies." The Captain permitted himself a rare and fleeting smile. "We are quite strong enough to handle all emergencies," he assured them."

"Are you down here at Copsley because of some

emergency?" Lady Charlotte persisted.

"How long will you be?" Antonia questioned, eagerly.

"Yes. Will they keep the Army here to protect us?" Lady Charlotte demanded. "Do they look for an uprising here?"

"An uprising!" Antonia repeated.

"Isn't that what they are doing in Paris, sending the army around to keep order in the city?" Lady Earle challenged the Captain.

"Are they expecting an uprising?" Antonia wanted to know.

"What do you *think*, Charles?"

"I am here to visit you and Miss Desmond, my old friend and *her* best friend, as you invited me to at the ball in Dublin all those weeks ago. Let's say," Charles Carney said, "that I took the opportunity when it was offered. I was forced to undertake a little army work, but I find that no disadvantage. I like to combine things, you see. And I find the best combination to be pleasure and work. Don't you agree, Miss Desmond?"

"I wish we could offer you greater pleasure," Antonia said.

"If I were Tony's age I would volunteer to take you around and show off Copsley to you, ugly as it is."

"So far I've seen nothing but the beauty of it," the Captain murmured.

"Nor I. *I* think," Antonia confided, "Lottie secretly cherishes it.

"I cherish it less," Lady Charlotte said, "now that I feel trapped in it."

"I would be delighted to take the Captain around." Antonia turned to him with a smile. "I shall prove to

you that it is not in the least ugly.”

“My dear Miss Desmond, I never believed for an instant that it was.”

Captain Carney was on his feet at once. In his uniform he loomed large and almost noble to the two women, and Antonia remarked to herself the trustworthy (and trustful) Irish look, his brownness and cragginess, impressed all over again with his virtues, which were Irish, too, and deeply ingrained.

Charlotte Earle sat back in her chair and watched the two—the tall man, towering so high over his graceful companion—cross the room and go out. She felt herself, without self-pity, to be forgotten. Why would she want to be remembered, an old lady looking out at life as through a window? From the window she followed the two dissimilar figures around the house and out of her vision. She sighed and squeezed her eyes shut against the outside world.

—XIX—

The sun shone quite dazzlingly upon them for the hour or so that Captain Carney and Antonia walked together around the grounds of Copsley. The Irish sun was like the Irish character, Antonia had often thought. It was steady and true for only short periods at a time. This was one of those periods, for the sun, at least, and Copsley had rarely been displayed so well as it was now in the clear October weather. It might have been July, so sunny and warm did it seem to Antonia, preceding Captain Carney on their walk, showing him the horses in their bright stalls, the garden, the park with its trees like rows of spectators, listening to the tuneful song of the birds and their excited chatter, like gossips around a clothes-line—and all the varied scene of Copsley which Antonia had come to love in the weeks she had been visiting Charlotte.

“I’ll hate to leave it,” Antonia confessed.

They were standing beneath the tall, protective trees. The sun could be seen in its full midday splendor but they were untouched by whatever discomfort it may threaten.

“Where will you go?” Captain Carney inquired. He kept his tone neutral but clearly he meant it, she knew, as no idle question.

“To Dublin, I suppose,” she told him. “Yes, yes,

it will be to Dublin—I'm sure—," Antonia added, doubtfully.

"Don't you *know*?" he questioned, seriously.

"Lottie needs me here," Antonia confided. "She is quite alone, you see. We're *both* quite alone. It's part of our attraction for each other."

He allowed himself a smile. "*I'm* quite alone," he told her.

"*You*, Captain?" Antonia looked at him with a serene disbelief. "You have your army."

"It's not *my* army," he protested.

"I'm sure they must think they are."

"A man needs more than an army," Charles Carney started to say.

It was Antonia who laughed now. "*More* than an army, Captain?"

"I meant—."

He was confused for a moment, because something in her rallying tone stirred in the soldier a mix of emotions that military men do not often experience.

"I meant," he repeated, "something besides an army," he finished, lamely.

"Shall we go in, Captain?"

"I ought to be getting back," Captain Carney said.

"So soon?"

"I was here an hour," he pointed out, "before you were."

"*I am* sorry, Captain," Antonia said. "If I'd have known."

"An hour is not a long enough time, I know. And the rest of the time has sped by so quickly."

"But you will be staying. The army isn't taking you off somewhere right away?"

"I hope not."

"We feel so much safer with you here, Captain

Carney."

"Nothing will happen to you, I assure you."

"Oh, I am not concerned for myself, Captain. Somehow, I cannot bring myself to fear the Irish."

"I doubt," the Captain said, "that you *would* have anything to fear from an Irishman."

"But everyone *is* more troubled now than anytime I can remember," Antonia said. "I try to tell myself that it is foolish and, even childish, it may be."

"Dublin would seem no safer," the soldier told her.

"You are probably right, Captain Carney," Antonia conceded. Then she added, "You will want to say good-by to Lottie, won't you?"

"I shall be back again the day after tomorrow," Charles Carney said. He scanned the sky. He looked at his watch. He held his watch to his ear and shook it. He frowned. The sun had stopped shining. The day had turned again. The day now was like any Irish day of uncertain weather.

"Promise?"

"I promise," the Captain told her.

"Lottie needs company. I do, too," Antonia admitted. "We look forward to visits. Sometimes it seems a long distance to Dublin, and even between houses. Soon the days will be shorter and the dark will come on early, it will snow, and it will be hard for the horses to get us from place to place. I won't even be able to ride some days," Antonia said. "We shall be utterly dependent on our dearest friends, of which you are one, Captain," she concluded.

"Friends," Captain Carney repeated, wistfully.

"You are among the very dearest, Charlotte tells me," Antonia said.

"Charlotte did," he repeated.

"Yes. She thinks highly of you," Antonia said. "She often tells me so."

"I am very pleased. But—"

"Charlotte talks about you often, Captain Carney."

"I was not aware of that," he told Antonia. "We have been friends a long time."

"And she is very grateful for that, Captain," Antonia assured him, warmly.

The Captain swallowed and pushed on, "Charlotte's friend?"

Antonia appeared to be waiting. "I beg your pardon, Captain Carney?" she said.

"I was wondering, Miss Desmond," he said, "about Charlotte's friend."

"Lottie," she informed him, "has a thousand friends." Antonia sounded and looked uncertain.

"But she lives with only one," the Captain pointed out. "It's *that* friend that I wondered about," he said.

Antonia smiled at him. "I wonder about that friend perhaps more than *you* do, Captain Carney."

The smile so clearly dazzled him that he forgot what it was he had started to say. It replaced the sun, the Captain thought, the smile on the lips of this creature. It held his gaze and nearly turned his head. He stood above her, a tall, helpless soldier, shifting from one leg to the other. In battle he was fearless and cool of head. He was efficient, and deadly with adversaries pressing him in front and behind. His brain would be clear and his mind would run with the precision of the watch in his pocket.

Yet here alongside this young girl, he marveled, his tongue was tied and his thoughts were scattered.

"Miss Desmond."

"Antonia attempted to match his seriousness. His tone sounded so earnest, urgent, desperate. "Captain Carney?"

Charles Carney inhaled deeply. He looked past her, not meeting her smile, not daring to meet her eyes. "May I come again?"

"You mustn't *dream* of leaving just yet, Captain," Antonia said. "You haven't been here nearly long enough."

Captain Carney sighed.

"That's true," he agreed.

"And we've hardly talked."

"I've done most of the talking, I'm afraid. If I have," he pleaded, "please forgive me."

"You, Captain Carney? You could hardly out-talk two women."

Whatever Captain Carney was about to rejoin, his mouth opened, and there was something on his tongue that he was about to reveal, was lost when there was the sound of wheels on the gravel and the rhythmic pounding of hoofs. Someone was driving into Copsley and, hearing this, and at once making the connection, Antonia's eyes shone, but she did not immediately turn.

To anyone riding toward them they would have seemed like a couple together in some silent pact. Their bodies were separated by mere inches. Captain Carney, crimson coloring his personable jaw, looked fiercely ardent and vulnerable.

Wildhearne, alone in his carriage, urged his horse in the direction of the two motionless figures. He had seen Antonia at once (although he had expected to find her inside, and was distracted at discovering her to be so close, and not, as he had anticipated, alone).

The magnet of Antonia's presence, however, had

drawn his eyes toward her, and there it encountered the man, the soldier, he remembered from their previous meeting.

"Captain Carney?" he said, curtly, as he stepped down.

He removed his hat. He dressed like the county gentleman, which his position here forced upon him. The grays and tweeds of his clothing, the formal elegance of his hat, and the high finish of his trim, speedy carriage all composed for the eye an eloquent picture as striking in its way as the uniformed figure and the girl at his side.

"This *is* a surprise," Antonia said, and indeed she felt it to be—a tingling surprise. She attempted—successfully—to conceal the pleasure from its source.

"Miss Desmond," Wildhearne formally greeted the girl he had ridden all the miles between Lisleigh and Copsley for a glimpse of.

"What an exciting day it's been, with *two* unexpected visitors. I was complaining just now to Captain Carney about the loneliness of Copsley. And now he will think that I am not to be believed." Captain Carney smiled shyly and shook his head.

"The Captain is not on duty, then," Wildhearne said, maliciously. He had strode from his carriage to where Antonia was standing with her military companion. She felt dwarfed between the two men. It seemed to her as though the sun were back in its proper place in the sky.

"A soldier is never far from his duty, Lancing," Captain Carney said.

"I suppose you're informing Lady Charlotte and Miss Desmond of the recent events in our neighborhood—"

"*What* recent events?" Antonia wanted to know. "What were we to be informed *about*?"

"It is hardly worth thinking about," the Captain dismissed it.

"Then what *is* Mister Lancing referring to?" Antonia wanted to know. Yet she thought she knew, herself, what it must be. And if that should prove to be the case, she would have conspired to keep it from Charlotte (as Lottie, she suspected, would surely have withheld it from Antonia).

"The Captain could enlighten you. That is why he's here—along with all those men. Perhaps he's forgotten."

"What does he mean, Captain Carney?" Antonia inquired.

"It wasn't necessary for you to be alarmed," the Captain told Antonia.

"Alarmed? At what, Captain Carney? Why should I be alarmed? What is there to be alarmed about? Please speak plainly, Captain?"

Wildhearne had joined them within the sheltering borders of the great trees that stood like battalions around them. "Perhaps the military wants to keep the matter to itself."

"I think that would be preferable, rather than spreading the matter all over the county."

"What are you gentlemen referring to?" Antonia demanded. "*What* is it that must not be spread all over the county?"

"The Captain thinks he has tracked down some dangerous Irish criminals, right here on our doorsteps," Wildhearne said, gesturing with contempt.

"Nothing of the kind, Miss Desmond. I have my orders. And my orders were to follow up on some

recent disturbing events that have resulted in some unfortunate actions."

"So you mean the killing?" Antonia persisted.

"There will be no repetition of that," Captain Carney assured her.

"There will be no repetition of that!" Wildhearne almost jeered. "Are we to accept that as comforting? Are the authorities only aware now of the danger we are in? You are only carrying out orders, you say. Perhaps it would have been wise to follow those orders earlier, when there might have been an opportunity to be useful—"

Captain Carney gave his full attention to Antonia. "Don't let yourself be alarmed. My men and I are close by. Everything is being done that can be done. There will be no time of night or day when attention will be allowed to slacken. We are out to prevent any further irregularities."

"Irregularities!" Wildhearne repeated, in a burst. "Captain Carney has been too long out of Ireland. The irregularity he is talking about resulted in a death. Perhaps in Paris that is what death has become for the French, an irregularity. Here in Ireland it has not been taken for granted yet." To Antonia he said: "I'm sorry if I have spoken disagreeably. I do not want to be the one to alarm you. Perhaps Captain Carney is right in not confiding in you."

"No!" Antonia exclaimed, with a passion that both men observed with admiration, and were stirred by. "I am a woman. I am not a toy that has to be treated as though it were fragile and that it might come apart at a touch. I want nothing kept from me, even if you think it will frighten me, alarm me, as *you* say. Captain Carney, you have no right to conceal anything from me. If you care for my friendship, and

my regard for you, you must trust me. You said you were visiting here, not that you and your men were stationed here."

"There is a certain secrecy that every military action must observe, no matter how trifling," Captain Carney told her. "I regret it. I would avoid it if I could. Still, it's for the best. It gives us a slight advantage over our adversary. He is forced to guess what we may do. At least he won't learn from us what our intentions toward him are. Too often we advertise what we know. The French are more discreet. And the French are able to take their adversaries by surprise."

"And behead them," Wildhearne said.

"Ours are in no danger of that," the Captain murmured, "at least."

So that was it, Antonia reflected. The killing that had taken place had been traced to the Defenders, she suspected now, and this discovery was a disappointment to her. The Defenders name suggested to her, and she had believed, that their program was to defend Ireland against those who threatened it. To find that the Defenders were killing as callously as the English and their sympathizers were known to do disturbed her painfully. It had been in her mind, in her dreams, in her fears.

Since hearing about it Antonia had awakened twice in the night with a cry into the darkness. Fortunately there was no one close enough to her apartments to hear her and be alarmed; Lottie slept on another floor and the servants occupied their own echoing wing of the house. She was free to undergo her fright without thought of anybody else. She could have screamed without interrupting the nighttime sleep of Copsley.

"Do you mean," Antonia said, with horror, "that it might happen again?" She put a hand to her forehead. Wildhearne stepped toward her. Captain Carney shot him an irritated glance. The two men faced each other, glaring.

"Do you think anybody is likely to move against one of the houses out here with an army stationed practically at its doorstep?" Wildhearne asked.

"Was it the Defenders?" Antonia faltered, preferring really to be told the opposite. She did not care for the question she had asked, and was afraid of the answer.

"We have no evidence as to that," Captain Carney said. "And that is a police matter, the sifting, the tracking and the arresting. Our job is somewhat different. We're here to prevent violence, no matter *who* may be responsible. And now," he added, "I mustn't detain you longer. You didn't invite me and so I must not overstay."

They watched his tall, military person march (literally march) across the grass and vanish. A moment later they heard hoofs racing over the ground and horse and rider appeared briefly before being swallowed by the heavy green trees.

"I'm sorry," Wildhearne said, contritely.

"Lottie will want to see you. Won't you come in, Mister Lancing?"

"In a moment," Wildhearne raised a hand as though to check her, then lowered it again as Antonia made no move toward the house. "I'm afraid," he said, "that you must disapprove of me."

"Disapprove of you, Mister Lancing?"

"I hope I haven't frightened you."

Antonia faced him candidly. "Ireland frightens me," she told Wildhearne. "Where is it going? What

is it doing to itself? Where is it taking us?"

"Is that what you were asking Captain Carney?"

"I didn't think of it when I was talking to Captain Carney," she answered. "He might have been able to tell me."

"I doubt if he can. I doubt if anybody at all can," Wildhearne asserted.

"You seem to be very pessimistic about your countrymen," Antonia observed.

"I have nothing to say," Wildhearne told her, "for or against my countrymen. They are Irish," he said. "That's destiny."

"I don't know what that means, I think," Antonia told him.

"It means that there are more important things than Irish destiny to think about and dream about, Miss Desmond."

"I disagree with you, Mister Lancing, most passionately," Antonia said.

He inclined his body toward her in a graceful way and offered Antonia an arm. "Come. Shall we declare a truce?" he said. "Let us call now on Lady Charlotte. Perhaps the rain will begin, and postpone my return to Lislaughton for a couple of delightful hours."

—XX—

Without anyone realizing it, everything had been building up to the ball at Lislaughton. By anyone, of course, is meant the lucky number who aspired to, and received, invitations to the event, for event, indeed, it was to the county, and to the sporting county families. Some, of course, had been inside Lislaughton before on various informal occasions. If you hadn't been to the ball you heard about it from those who had and you abided until an invitation arrived one day with the Lancing seal prominently and haughtily displayed. (So much like Wildhearne, his critics were sure to remark.)

But critics, acquaintances, friends, or merely neighbors, the gentry of the county, all would be present when the looked-forward-to affair took place. Lady Earle had spoken about nothing but the ball to Antonia for weeks. Characteristically, she wanted only the smallest excuse to desert Copsley, that bane of Lady Charlotte's days and nights.

She had only praise for Lislaughton. "Some of the Lancings, the first Lancing and several others, are buried there. I do believe that it contributes to a house's lineage, having its founder present at all times, even beneath the sod," Lady Charlotte said, "you can tell in a moment that some extraordinary events took place at Lislaughton. And they will

again," she predicted.

They were being driven to the ball in Lady Earle's carriage. She and Antonia sat back among the cushions and felt the earth glide smoothly away beneath the horses' hoofs, which had the level, deliberate throb, Antonia perceived, as her own heartbeats.

The thudding hoofs upon the ground might have been her own heart pounding, so audibly, she thought, that they might give her away to Lottie, alongside her. Antonia had tried—with what success she couldn't say—to pretend (to herself first, and then to Lottie) that this night at Lislaughton would be as little different as the ones she had spent visiting at any of the surrounding county houses.

Antonia respected her friend Charlotte's views, aware, though, that Lady Earle had a particular perception relating not alone to Wildhearne but to *all* the Lancings, and that it must affect Antonia's own attitudes as it was being shaped by her daily experience of the man.

She was quiet, alongside Charlotte. The evening was peacefully lit by the stars and, whatever the prediction for the morrow, this evening itself was chill and clear. Still, it was as though Providence itself, which was always willful with the lesser breeds among the Lancings, took unto itself a special interest as to Wildhearne, and was now thoughtfully assisting at his triumph this cold night. How *could* Ireland, with its habitual rains its comfortless overcasts, alter itself so cheerfully as to offer this splendid evening at so timely an hour and been made so docile without heavenly intervention?

For once Lady Charlotte did not insist, as she nearly always did, on taking the reins, and the driver sat alone with the seemly deportment and the com-

forting absent-mindedness of his kind.

They drove ahead at an unvarying speed and soon the carriage had left Copsley behind, in the darkness, along with such other houses adjacent to Lady Earle's. The horses picked their way over the familiar dirt road.

Here there was only silence and solitude. Surrounding Wildhearne's house there were acres of solitariness and seclusion. The early Lancings had built their manor more like a stockade that was designed more as protection in the middle of an empty, green wildness. There was a little wildness left now in Ireland as, say, in France or in England but Lislaughton still stood alone and remote in a flat, somewhat bleak landscape.

"Dear Lottie!" Antonia exclaimed, impulsively. "I can feel you thinking."

"You know all my thoughts, my dear."

"And you know all mine," she assured her friend.

"I wish I could be sure," Lottie said.

"I have so few thoughts," Antonia sighed, "about anything."

"You see?"

"What do you mean, Lottie?"

"That you don't—you won't—say what you think."

"About what, dear Lottie?"

"Lislaughton."

"I've never *been* there, Lottie."

"I know, dear. I suppose what I meant is Wildhearne."

"What *is* there to think of Wildhearne?" Antonia asked. "As a matter-of-fact, it's quite useless thinking of Wildhearne. He seems already married."

"Oh, my dear!"

"Married," Antonia repeated, "to Ireland, to the past, to the tradition of aristocracy. One day he will meet and marry some British countess or duchess—he deserves nothing less, I know, than an English princess—and they will make a little fiefdom of Lislaughton and will live happily in it with no more than a mere pretense of being Irish. In some ways," she said, "he is like the last of those French aristocrats who are going on trial now in Paris, accused of turning their backs on the French people, and being made to pay dearly for it, in blood."

Lady Charlotte gave a shudder. "The French aristocrats," she repeated. "Surely you don't believe that what is happening in France will be perpetrated upon us?"

"I don't know," Antonia said.

"I don't say you are wrong about Wildhearne."

Antonia sighed. "I only wish I were."

"I don't say you are wrong," Lady Charlotte repeated, "but you see I do not know him. No," she said, "I cannot say I know Wildhearne, although I have known him since he was a boy, and was brought to see me by his mother. Of course he is an aristocrat. Of course he loves Ireland. And what Ireland is there to love, except Old Ireland? But he is a man. I feel that he is a man in search of the woman who will give him shape or form. Yes, my darling," she laid a hand on Antonia's arm, "*you* can be that woman."

Antonia could not but look startled. It was dark, though, and her expression could not be seen. "I?"

Lady Charlotte slapped her arm lightly. "Don't be such an innocent," she said. "You know very well that Wildhearne is intrigued with you."

"*Intrigued?* That sounds," Antonia said, "like those conspirators everybody is talking about."

“Wildhearne is intrigued with anyone who doesn’t genuflect before him. *You* don’t, my darling. You don’t bend the knee to anybody.” She added, mischievously, “Not even to me. But *I’m* able to forgive you. Wildhearne won’t.”

“And you think I must bend the knee to Wildhearne?”

“Don’t you want to get married, my girl?”

Antonia settled back into the reaches of the carriage. She felt herself trembling, although that might be with expectation. Surely they had been riding long enough to have reached Lislaughton. Outside there was no change in the darkness. Black Ireland spread out around them, looking, concealed as it was under the layers of night, endless, like a great, expanding void, more than a country, a universe.

She felt troubled by Charlotte’s observations and she was forced to credit them. She had compelled her brain to accept Wildhearne’s existence and attentions in separate compartments, to be taken out and looked closely at later, when there was more time.

“We ought to be there soon,” her companion was remarking at the very instant that the carriage halted, although so abruptly and so upsettingly that the two women were flung into each other’s arms.

“Stevens!” Lady Charlotte called severely to the man in the driver’s seat. “What is it! What is it, man!” At the same moment she gave an audible gasp and sank back.

“Lottie! Lottie darling! What *is* it?” Antonia demanded.

The answer soon made itself manifest. A masked horseman confronted them, his face close to the two women, his appearance before them seeming to Antonia so inexplicable and unexpected that she half-

believed it to be part of the entertainment that might be looked for at Lislaughton—she had been told to anticipate a surprise. And surprised indeed she was.

The door of the carriage was yanked violently open and a voice muffled by the mask shouted, "Get down! Out here on the ground!"

Another voice rose out of the darkness as though in remonstrance but the first man spoke louder and sounded furious. "I got a wife an' a houseful of mouths to keep filled an' them riding around like the Queen of England with jewels an' furs an' silk dresses an' carriages—carriages, while Ireland goes hungry. Get out!" he bawled. "Get down now!"

"You needn't be all that rough on the gentry, lad," the second voice, more hushed, told him. "Yuh don't need to be assertin' your loyalty, now boyo."

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Now, boyo. Now"

"The hell with your boyo," the first masked rider, who was still at the window of the carriage, jeered over his shoulder. "You're a gutless wonder, *you* are. I could handle bigger jobs than this with no help from the likes of you." The horse moved restlessly, circularly, as though anxious to be out of there.

The two women stepped out of the warm carriage and stood chilled in the night air. Antonia was trembling, though with anger, rather than fright.

"What do you want?" she demanded, coldly.

The man on horseback—there may have been others, there must be a gang but she was sure of only two, and but one was visible, above her in the darkness—snarled down at her in his now familiar (to Antonia's ears) accents. "What do I want? What do I want? she asks me—the hussy. Aye," he yelled, although he could have been heard if he lowered his

voice a full decibel. "What do I want?" he repeated, as though fond of the phrase. She thought he would laugh. It would have angered her further to be laughed at by him. "I'll take that coat," he said, and leaned from the saddle and whipped Lady Charlotte's fur cloak from around her, exposing her to the chill. "I'm tempted to take it to the wife," the horseman said. "How else is an Irish workingman's woman to get a fine coverin', though she works til her knuckles bleed?"

"I'd gladly give you what money I have—," Antonia said.

"You'll not give us anything that we can't take with our own honest efforts," the man said.

"Honest!" Antonia could not help repeating.

It made him want to argue with her. "Yuh think us thieves, do you, madam?"

"What else are you?" Lady Earle demanded, finding her voice for the first time. "You hold up our carriage and take the clothes from my back and make demands on us. If you are not thieves what do you gentlemen regard yourselves as?"

"Gentlemen!" the masked horseman bawled. "Everytime I hear the word gentleman I'm reminded of the bloody English that invaded this land."

"Come along, boyo," the other man pleaded. He did not show himself, and his voice coming from behind them in the darkness conveyed a curiously disembodied effect. "Save the speeches until the meetin'."

"Listen, sir?" Antonia put in. She saw that Lady Charlotte looked unnerved and highly vulnerable reduced to standing in the road in evening gown and dancing pumps. She could not see herself, of course, but could imagine that she must appear somewhat

comic as well.

And there was a current of fear underlying all of this. The masked man sounded almost savage. He was surely armed. It was clear that he was in command—or had command—and that his gentler companion could do nothing with him, except further to anger him, and make him more dangerous.

“Please listen to me,” she appealed to him. “The people of Ireland have my sympathy. I would do anything for them, what little I have I would share with them if I could. You can take my money—I have little use for it. But you must not take me for an enemy of Ireland. I love Ireland. I’d lay down my life for it.”

“Hear! Hear!” the second man in the darkness called. “She’s better than a man.” He added, speaking confidently to Antonia, “Some men we’ve had acted more like ladies than you ladies do. So it’s not only bein’ Irish, you see. Maybe more’s needed than a gallon of Irish blood.”

“Shut your mouth!” the masked horseman shouted over his shoulder. “Or it’ll be closed for you with a ball from this pistol.” Antonia trembled. He was armed. He was savage; he sounded crazy; and he carried a loaded gun. Now she shivered for herself and Lottie. Antonia reached for Charlotte’s hand and took it in her own. Charlotte’s fingers felt icy and bloodless. Her own, Antonia thought, were probably no different. “You!” Antonia took it that she was being addressed by the angry highway.

“I?” she inquired, sounding (and appearing) more haughty than she felt.

“You,” he repeated, so that there could remain no doubt at all of it. “I want you,” he told her, “to give me those jewels.”

Relieved, Antonia slipped the simple gold ring (her mother's last gift) from her finger and held it up to the rider. He made no move to take it.

"That's all I have. It was my mother's gift," Antonia confided. "It's hardly a jewel at all. You see, I have no other."

The man on the horse pointed dramatically. Antonia's heart thudded in her breast. She saw the gun clearly now. And it was aimed directly at Charlotte.

—XXI—

Antonia uttered a little scream. She put her hand to her mouth to suppress it. It felt cold and numb against her lips. The man wouldn't, she kept thinking and telling herself; he couldn't, she thought.

Charlotte stood in the roadway with the pistol pointed at her. A chill wind blew across the downs and touched them both in passing. Antonia was standing shivering, facing her friend. The man with his face hidden sat in his saddle as his horse danced restlessly alongside the saddle. The driver of the carriage sat like a hulk on his exposed seat, the reins in his hands, the whip at his side.

There was a moon. Antonia noted. A partial moon hung like a golden remnant in the sky. Antonia's eyes took it in and absorbed it, for memory. She had never been in this position before. She must remember it. She would always remember it,—the incomplete, metallic moon, the wind in the branches of the trees, the horses' restlessness and neighing—the animals communicating their nearness to each other,—Charlotte's cold, white, withdrawn face and the man in the saddle pointing his pistol at Lottie.

"What do you want?" Antonia she managed to say.

"Her jewels." The weapon in his hands was steady. The hand did not tremble or waver from its

target.

"I don't know what you mean."

"She don't know what I mean."

The bandit jeered at Antonia's words, twisting them as he uttered them, concluding with a jarring laugh. "Are you some kind of foreigner? Don't I make myself plain?" He turned his bulky body in the saddle. "Do I make myself plain, boyo?" he called back, apparently to his companion, who remained outside the small circle.

"We'd best get on with it," came the disembodied voice. Instinctively Antonia turned toward where the voice came from. This disturbed the man on horseback. He uttered a sound and stood up in the stirrup, probably for emphasis.

"No you don't!" he called down to Antonia. "No you don't, lass! Keep your eyes down where they belong." He waved the gun now in Antonia's direction. "I don't want you to be givin' descriptions to the police."

"Please let us go," Antonia pleaded. "There must be some mistake. You surely can have nothing against us."

"Quiet!" the man in the roadway said. "You'll do as I tell you."

"Com on now, lad," his companion and lieutenant advised, "we been here long enough. We got a long ways to go this night."

The one on the horse uttered a shocking expletive. Surely he must have been drinking. Antonia had never heard such a word uttered in her presence before and strangely, she felt more embarrassed for Charlotte than for herself. Her ears tingled and she felt herself turn red. What right had he—they—to subject two defenseless and unsuspecting women to

so humiliating an assault upon both modesty and decency?

"Have you no decency, sir?" Antonia demanded, icily. "Certainly you must have sisters of your own." "Surely," she said, "you would not talk before them that way." Her lips trembled and her voice broke. But fear had fled and Antonia felt only frustration at being on the ground in her light dancing pumps, her long, fragile gown and with a bullying man mounted on a horse and using abusive words that she could not properly counter with words of her own.

"*Do get on, lad,*" the horseman's comrade said, insistently.

The masked man uttered the expletive again in the direction of his unseen companion and then gave his attention once more to the two women before him.

"I'll take those jewels now," he told Antonia, in a reasonable voice that sounded nevertheless deceptive to her ears. "Now hand them over."

Antonia handed up her ring to the robber but he pulled back from her and gestured commandingly with the gun. "Not that!" he said. He pointed with the weapon. "Now," he added, briskly, "you'll hand me what she's got on."

Lady Charlotte was wearing the pearls that she took out of her gem case only on the rare occasion—such as this one—when she moved on a level with her peers. She had on a rare bracelet with a setting of diamonds that glittered under the moon like a collection of fireflies. Charlotte's rings. Just why only two of them afforded her some little comfort, she could not have said. There was no time for lengthy impressions or leisurely observation. Everything had happened as suddenly as it was unex-

pected. Antonia hardly remembered alighting from the back of the carriage and setting foot upon the ground. And she was now cold and compulsively shivering. The evening had seemed mild when they started out, but here in the roadway the weather had turned cold and numbing.

Antonia watched with almost hypnotic concentration as the highwayman leaned down for the back of the horse and snatched at Lady Charlotte's throat. Defensively—and quite uselessly—Lady Earle raised her ringed fingers, as though to protect her pearls from the swooping hand of the man above her in the saddle.

Some sound that came to Antonia's ears and startled her into attention.

There *was* a gang then, her mind informed her as the sounds grew louder and closer. She watched the man intently to discover whether he heard what he was hearing. If the man did, she decided, he was ignoring it. It must be then, she thought, no threat to these two. Probably it was their companions, marauding, as these two were, and now riding to join them here.

Antonia's alert hearing followed the drum of hoofs as though it ran underground and surfaced dully at a few places behind her, and far short of her. In her concentration she had forgotten herself, her fear and the painful condition of Charlotte, confronting the loss of the valuable jewels she was wearing.

There was no mistaking the sounds now. Men on horses *were* speeding in this direction. They sounded close and purposeful. The thought afforded Antonia no comfort. Two men had been enough just to halt the lone carriage and to rob the two ladies. A band of highwaymen might provide the pair with assistance

in carrying out actions too terrifying to conceive of, although Antonia could not imagine what these were. She had heard of people being taken on the moors and vanishing for who knew how long, before they were released or rescued by the authorities. These riders, then, represented a new threat.

—XXII—

Suddenly gunfire rang out, disturbing the otherwise quiet night. The horseman stiffened in his saddle. He had been leaning down to snatch at Charlotte's jewels, then went rigid, his grasping hand clenching and unclenching emptily upon the air. He swore savagely and swung his horse to face the road, away from the direction of the shots. He must have kicked his horse because the animal leaped and then galloped forward and was swallowed by darkness.

The second horseman, unmasked but with an arm across his face, emerged, looked once in the direction from whence came the shots, then dug his heels into his mount's side and drove him into the night. He had made no sound. Charlotte still had her necklace, her bracelet and earring. But she stood shivering in the light dress, while her cloak vanished in the gunman's hands.

The two women fell into each other's arms in the road, and Antonia tried to warm her friend in her own coat, which was adequate but not the luxurious one that Charlotte had been wearing. Antonia uttered to herself a prayer of thanks for this. If the coat had been more desirable, she realized, it would have been torn from her from her shoulders as Charlotte's fur one had been.

They were allowed little time for an exchange be-

tween them. Each clasped the other's shivering body and, their arms around each other, they stood alongside Lady Charlotte's carriage, not sure yet if they had been delivered or whether there was another danger confronting them.

The driver climbed down with a heaviness of limb that would have struck them as comic on an occasion when humor might have been tolerable. It was fear, not age, or height, or weight—that deprived Lady Charlotte's man of his habitual agility. When he got to the ground his legs weakened further, and Antonia was forced to hold him up.

Captain Carney rode up to the carriage with a detail of soldiers. Antonia looked up at the uniformed figures with a surprise and gratitude. Though she need not have experienced surprise at encountering him here, she knew, in his capacity of military man and leader. She had already guessed the nature of his mission in the countryside. A man as valuable as Captain Carney would hardly have been casually shunted off to the country at a time so tumultuous in the history of Ireland.

Antonia stood rapt, gazing up into the austere features of the Captain, a protective arms sheltering Lottie, while she kept the driver from falling into the roadway.

Captain Carney stood up in his stirrups. He was putting his pistol back in its boot as he rode toward the two women in the road. He turned around in his saddle and gave some orders to his men and they rode away after the highwaymen.

He dismounted, and, though she could not see his expression—his voice sounded taut and anxious.

"Another minute and we would have captured them!" Captain Carney said. "They've gotten away

from us before. But we'll catch up with them."

"Who are they?" Antonia asked, but she was sure she knew.

Captain Carney took in their state at a glance. "Hadh't you better get back into the carriage?" He offered his sympathy to Charlotte. "They've taken your cloak. Well, you shall have it back, I promise you," he told her. "And the gentleman that stole it from you will spend a few years in shackles. I promise you that, too. Now," he directed them, "you'd best get back in now. It must be cold for you ladies."

"I wish I had my fur," Lady Charlotte. "I ought to have brought along another, for emergencies like this one. Traveling in Ireland," she said, "demands extraordinary methods."

"Did they get away with anything else?" he inquired, sharply.

"They were after my jewels," Lady Charlotte told him. "I was made to feel very rich, and very undesirable. Gentry, they called me. Gentry—me! I'm as Irish as they are—if they *are* Irishmen, and I can't believe they are—what Irishman would strip a lady and leave her in the road to get chilled and who knows what?"

"They're Irish all right," Captain Carney said, a little grimly. "And because they *are* Irish—and members of the Club—we'll be certain to get them—"

"The Club?" Antonia repeated.

"The Hell Fire Club. It's a secret society—at least, it's *supposed* to be a secret. But there are no secrets in Ireland, except who its leader is—or leaders. But these two weren't its leaders—you can be sure of that—"

"The Hell Fire club? Then who are they?"

“There isn’t time to explain—,” Captain Carney said, hurriedly. “It’s a recent development. The Defenders have split,” he tried to explain, “and the Hell Fire Club has gone out on its own. What they do you’ve seen tonight. You’ve experienced it. They regard themselves as more revolutionary than anybody else. And they strike anywhere, usually to get money to carry on their revolutionary activities—”

“The Hell Fire Club! I don’t believe it,” Antonia said. She gave a shudder. “He frightened me,” she told Captain Carney. “He was a savage brute. How *could* such a creature be allowed into a movement with ideals?”

“Ideals!” the Captain echoed. “They’re outlaws, highwaymen. They take money from helpless people and spend it on their own needs. No matter,” he said, breaking off. “This is not a social occasion. There’s no time for that.” As he talked he was helping the two women into their carriage. In the back Antonia and Charlotte huddled in each other’s arms. They made room for Captain Carney alongside them.

But he climbed into his saddle and rode beside it a little of the way toward Lislaughton. The driver started up slowly, his movements catatonic, like a man in shock.

“Will you be at Wildhearne’s?” Lady Charlotte called to Captain Carney.

“My dear Lady Charlotte, there are lawbreakers to hunt.

“*Hunt!* Antonia could not suppress the word and her horror of it. To hunt—foxes were hunted, and deer, and rabbits and all sorts of helpless creatures, run down by men in saddles, or shot at from behind trees and other shelter.

But Captain Carney was distracted, and didn’t hear

her. "I'll have one of my men follow your carriage. If one of the outlaws should come back—"

"Do you think he *will*?" Charlotte queried.

"I don't say he will but—." In the dark the Captain shrugged. He understood soldiers. He thought he understood horses. And at one time he thought he even understood the Irish. Now, he believed, the Irish were becoming as mysterious to the rest of us, and as villainous as the French. "You'll be allright with an escort."

He swerved his horse and turned its head back in the direction taken by the two riders. Antonia gestured a silent goodnight, and in a moment he was swallowed up by the darkness, with only his horse's hoofbeats drumming, like the beating of her heart, upon the soft ground.

Hell Fire, Antonia thought. She leaned back in the dark. Her head was against the back of the seat. Hell Fire. You were haunted by it, perhaps, Antonia was thinking, throughout a lifetime. And deep in her eyes she saw the flames leap.

—XXIII—

When they arrived at last at Lislaughton the mounted soldier who had ridden behind their carriage as guard and escort galloped off before they were able to express their gratitude. Before they reached the door of the house another rider loomed from the darkness.

"It's Quintin!" Lady Earle exclaimed. She sounded fully recovered from the unsettling earlier events and, though she missed her luxurious cloak, she was too high-spirited to be overcome by the loss. "Quintin," she repeated.

Quintin Lancing rode in and dismounted. He moved toward Antonia and Lady Charlotte with the awkwardness of a man who has come a long way on horseback. Antonia looked at him acutely. She was able to detect no blood resemblance at all between Quintin and Wildhearne. Quintin was shorter than Wildhearne, broader across the chest and flanks than his brother, more nondescript in his coloring and of a shy, and rather earnest disposition. He appeared to be highly controlled and did not waver or address the ladies until he was standing facing them.

"I hope you were not too inconvenienced," he said.

"We were indeed," Charlotte readily told him. "We have been very inconvenienced." She added, "I've lost my cloak, Quintin."

He nodded his head, gravely, as if he knew all about what they had undergone. "It must have been very uncomfortable for you," he said, and looked toward Antonia.

"Poor Lottie," Antonia told him. "I had nothing they wanted. It was Lottie who had to endure their insufferable attentions and intentions," she added. "I offered them my ring," she said, "and they ignored it."

"Did you lose anything else?" Quintin inquired.

"No," Charlotte said. "How did you learn about it?"

Quintin let a little smile play around his mouth. "We are not as isolated as we appear. Lisleaughton has to be protected. We've got a few responsibilities here. Our warden saw you stopped back there on the road. He was patrolling when he heard the horses and followed well behind them. When they stopped your carriage he rode back here to warn us. And I came out to find you."

"Alone?" Antonia said. "Wasn't it dangerous?"

"Dangerous? For *me*?" Quintin said. He appeared to think about the query for a moment. "No," he answered her then. "I really don't think it was."

"They had guns. At least," Charlotte told him, "one of them had, the wretch who wanted my jewels. Another moment and he would have had them, or strangled me over them. I was too uncomfortable really to be afraid."

"Dear Lottie," Antonia comforted her.

"I must say," Charlotte said, "I wasn't as calm as you were."

"I was terrified," Antonia confessed.

"Anybody who is armed," Quintin said, "represents a danger. Desperate men are dangerous men,

and while I don't believe they would have killed or even fired upon two defenseless ladies, Ireland is fast becoming unpredictable."

"What can we do?" Lady Earle asked.

"Just now," Quintin reminded her, "we can join the festivities."

He stepped to the side to allow Antonia and Lady Charlotte to precede him through the door and into the hall.

—XXIV—

Lislaughton Hall was noisy, festive and very gay-appearing. Ladies glittering with resplendent stones and gold and jeweled necklaces and with diamonds on their throats and wrists moved through the spacious, candle-lit room where servants passed among them carrying glasses that made beautiful ringing sounds on the crowded trays.

The musicians had been quiet when Antonia entered with Lady Charlotte, but now they started to play.

Antonia stood looking about her. There was no one there that she knew. But that did not surprise her. She had been out of Ireland since her parents died tragically in the accident that pursued her in bad dreams.

She felt a warm stirring in her breast, for her mother, for her father, too.

Charlotte had gone off to another part of Wildhearne's great house and Antonia idled where she was left, waiting. But she was not impatient. She was too full of a confusion of emotions and really would have chosen, had she been permitted, to half-recline in some shadowy corner, looking out as once she had when she was younger, at the flashing ladies and the virile gentlemen and imagining who they were and they lived and if all of them were half as happy as

they looked.

But there were no shadows in Lislaughton House tonight and she saw no corners that a young girl might have selected for secret observation. Instead she leaned against the wall—she still trembled a little from the adventure, and there was a weakness in her limbs that threatened her physically—and closed her eyes for a moment against the thrust of so much animation.

Antonia had had no opportunity even to review in her thoughts the experience back there on the road. She had always been proud of her Irish heritage. Whatever the English had to say against the Irish, her countrymen, Antonia knew, possessed a nature and a temperament that set them sharply apart from the French and the Spanish and the Italians and all the other natives of distant lands. The English professed contempt for this and for the native character, with its emphasis upon gaiety and spirited behavior. They found it—the English did, or said they did—irresponsible. And they printed jokes about the Irish nature that pretended to demonstrate that the Irish were improvident, ignoble and inferior. This sometimes made her furious.

Antonia would have liked to reply to them in kind. She had lived among the English and had adapted herself as she would have, she knew, to the Finns, or the Laplanders, so remote did the English appear to a visitor in their midst—a visitor from, perhaps, the Red Planet.

Such were her thoughts tonight. She was in no mood, she understood now, for gaiety, music and stimulants. She would have liked—perhaps along with Captain Carney—to be riding through the darkness, attentive but secure, enveloped in the soft

blanket of the night, the stars and all that mystery overhead.

Antonia had not seen Wildhearne. Quintin had taken the horses to the stalls, along with the one he was riding, and had no reappeared. Charlotte had probably met an acquaintance. She knew most of the guests present tonight, had had them all, no doubt, to Copsley at sometime or other. There were no demands made upon her, and Antonia hardly cared. A music was flowing through her that was in no sense dependent upon the instruments now in the hands of the musicians.

A voice spoke to her behind her, and Antonia turned. There was no one there. "It's me," the voice said. "You must know me."

Antonia smiled down at him. He was very small. She remembered him. "Dunstan. You're Dunstan. Aren't you?" she said, at once.

"Yes," Dunstan acknowledged. "How do you do?"

"Does that mean that we have been formally introduced?"

"It doesn't matter," Dunstan said, "except for the names."

"It's Antonia," Antonia told him. "Antonia Desmond."

"Are you married?"

"Would that make such a difference?" Antonia wanted to know.

"You *are* married."

"I'd know it," Antonia said, "if I were."

His look brightened. It made her laugh and she was grateful to discover that she *could* laugh, after what had befallen herself and Charlotte back there on the road from Copsley.

“Does that mean you’re not?” he pursued.

“Didn’t you say that it doesn’t matter except for the names?” Antonia reminded the child.

“Oh, but it *does*. Would you marry me?” Dunstan asked.

“Yes,” Antonia said, at once.

He turned crimson at that. “I don’t know what to do now,” he confessed.

“Most gentlemen don’t, either before marriage or afterward,” Antonia said.

But her heart lifted. She didn’t really credit what she said about most gentlemen. How many had she known? After the death of her parents she had been left alone, perhaps out of compassion on the part of the males who had made that decision, it may have been pity on their part or oversight.

Thinking of her father and mother in their fiery ending, she could not have responded to love had it been tendered. That it had not been was an accident—an incident—of fate. Fate set her parents on fire at a moment for them of great joy. The same fate deprived her of love and set her apart, scarred from a fire that had touched her physically not at all.

“May I please kiss your hand, then?”

Antonia extended her hand to the boy and then withdrew it. Impulsively she leaned and kissed the child, who raised his face and offered a space just between the crimson that suffused it. The boy caught his breath. Antonia felt an intake of her own, a delighted flutter in the breast. Not unlike love.

“I have never been kissed before,” Dunstan revealed.

“Not even by your mother?”

“I have no mother.”

“I have no mother, either,” Antonia said.

"Did you *ever* have a mother?" he inquired.

"Yes. All of us do," she told him.

"I've never had a mother," he repeated.

"Dear Dunstan. You deserve one," she said.

"If you marry me, why would I need a mother?"

"To love you," Antonia said.

"To love *me*?" Dunstan said. "Why would anybody do that?"

"Everybody," Antonia assured him, "should be loved."

"Worthy sentiments," a man's voice said alongside her. Antonia looked up. Quintin Lancing, looking about as he had when he met them outside the house, was standing beside her. He had come up so quietly and suddenly, appearing behind her when she was momentarily absorbed with Dunstan, that Antonia was startled.

She wondered how he had learned to move so lightly. He must, she concluded, be a particularly graceful dancer, and she meant to find out. Besides, she owed him that for his concern about her, riding out when Lislaughton had a houseful of guests, and venturing into the darkness and danger for her benefit, hers and Charlotte's.

Antonia laughed. "You approve, then?" she queried.

"About everybody being loved?" Quintin said.

"What do you say, chap?" he asked Dunstan.

"I see you are unwilling to commit yourself, Mister Lancing."

"All statements contain a truth," he said, "except where they are demonstrably false."

"It was about love," Dunstan reminded Quintin, "not truth."

"You think there is a distinction between them?"

Antonia spoke as if to Dunstan, looking at Quintin.

"I don't know what all that means," Dunstan confessed. "Isn't that Lady Earle," he said, "looking for you?"

—XXV—

"My dear Tony," Charlotte called across the room to Antonia. "Whatever are you doing huddled like that in a corner?" She raised her glasses which, at her age, were no longer merely fashionable. "It's you, Quintin. And Dunstan." To the boy she said, "This is my friend and guest, Miss Desmond. Miss Desmond," Lottie told the room, "is the most beautiful young women in Ireland."

"And I am going to marry her," the boy said in a loud voice. Some ladies passing laughed and applauded. The gentlemen's deeper tones joined and enhanced the gay sound, and, blushing like a very shy young man, the boy fled.

"I'm afraid we've embarrassed him. I must go to him," Antonia said.

"Go to him later, my dear," Charlotte advised. "Right now you must meet my friends and whist partners. And Lottie—becoming Lady Earle in an instant—introduced Antonia to a group of well-dressed persons, who inclined themselves toward her and murmured pleasantries.

"We learned about your dismal experience on the road here," one of them, a Mistress Fraly, said. She placed her hand on the arm of a gentleman who was surely Mister Fraly. He had gray, frizzed hair and he looked, as so many of the Irish gentry looked, like an

eighteenth-century English peer. (Antonia wondered if it were intentional.)

"The roads are no longer safe in Ireland," Mister Fraly announced. "We are threatened even in our homes."

"My dear," his wife smiled and warned him. "You are alarming the ladies."

"And the men, laddie," one of his friends put in. "The Kinsellas were the victims of a hold-up just last week. Their horses were stolen, much of their jewelry was taken, the money for the rents that had just been collected was appropriated and, to add to the score, several of the men servants were spirited off."

A couple came by at this point to listen and participate. Antonia saw that most of the guests were preoccupied and disturbed so that introductions, a rigid convention on every occasion, were being suspended on this one. Antonia did not mind. She was grateful for the dispensation. She was afraid that she would be unable to adjust her expression to the changing nature of the chance encounter that she would be subjected to because of the grim event that had befallen herself and Charlotte.

"The men *servants*?" "What would they do with them—*enslave* them?" This brought a discreet titter.

"In that club of theirs," another lady put in, "that Hell Fire Club. If I find my servants in league with them." She stopped and swallowed. A man servant was passing with refreshments. She waited until he was out of earshot and even then lowered her voice. "I suspect them, all of them. How do these outlaws know just when and where to strike. They appear to be very familiar with the houses they break into. And

there's a reason for that—the servants. They're in sympathy with them—the Hell Fires. If you want to know who the Hell Fires are—ask the servants."

There was some throat-clearing then and a gentleman-inquired if there was anyone for cards and the little conversational group melted into smaller components.

Turning from them with a feeling of giddiness that she had not experienced before and that she had not been aware of earlier, Antonia faced Quintin, who had just entered behind her.

"Wildhearne will be here in a moment," he told Antonia, as if to reassure her.

"Where is Mister Lancing?" Antonia inquired, lightly, and looked around.

She saw Charlotte emerge from another room and watched her friend's progress being interrupted by what appeared to be two friends of Lottie's. A tiny current of what could have been jealousy coursed through her but it was as tiny as it was inexplicable and was erased almost at once by Antonia's good sense.

Why *shouldn't* her beloved Lottie have friends who were strangers, Antonia thought, to her—Antonia? There were probably a dozen ladies in the room—and more than that many men—who had been known to Lottie longer than Antonia had known her.

Still, she experienced a tremor of loneliness that was not to be lightly assuaged. Antonia had a depth of feeling very different from the ordinary, and was highly vulnerable to emotions such as these. (It was the deeply sensitive part of her nature, and could not be changed without radically altering what was enduringly feminine about her.)

Perhaps it was this facet of her nature that held Quintin to her side. He remained, looking steadily into her face, without replying to her words, so that Antonia thought he had not heard her.

"I hope you were not cold," Quintin said, now.

"Yes, but I've warmed myself now," Antonia told him. A shiver went through her just the same as she thought of herself and Charlotte standing out on the dark road with the highwaymen ordering them about like servants.

Until she said it, Antonia had not noticed that she was particularly warm, but at that moment she became conscious that there were two areas of burning, one into each cheek. She could not have seen it or even felt it but her eyes burned, too, causing them to sparkle like the jewels worn by some of the ladies present.

She looked radiant, and lovely, and rare, and men looked toward her in passing, and this, at least, Antonia was aware of, gratifyingly aware of, roused by it and pleased by it in a purely feminine way.

"They're beginning to dance again," Quintin pointed out.

He looked to Antonia as though he were only hovering there before taking flight. What a shy man he must be, Antonia was thinking, where would he go to, if he were to leave these festivities, as he appeared to be on the verge of doing. Impulsively, she decided to keep him there.

Besides, she liked him—liked his serious, humorless look, his gray, candid eyes, and his height—he was no taller than she was, and looked smaller because he had a heavier frame, muscular and big-chested.

"Are you asking me to dance, Mister Lancing?"

she teased, feeling her cheeks flame and grow more deeply red. A smile, Antonia saw, lurked unfamiliarly at the corners of his mouth. Perhaps he was not as humorless as he appeared. Men revealed themselves in different ways. (Not that Antonia knew much about men. She had not remembered even being attracted to them until after her seventeenth birthday, when it was no longer possible for men to disregard her.)

Quintin inclined his body in gentlemanly acquiescence and the two of them moved into the hall where the dance had just begun. Antonia followed Quintin in an entirely feminine way, hardly noticing what the dance was, and that it was not being led in the formal way practiced in more conventional places. Quintin's arms drew Antonia into the dance and she let her body ease against his, her hands resting lightly upon the biceps that thrust against the sleeves of his jacket.

Quintin dancing was different from the Quintin she had met earlier. For one thing, he moved with a fine grace. He was not a dancer. Antonia could tell that he spent little time on the dance floor. His sense of music—its tempo and rhythm—she discovered to be uncertain. It did not matter. He gave her and the dance and the murmurous, lyric music an appreciation and a concentration that lent the dance a kind of power that Antonia did not remember having experienced before.

In fact, she grew quite dizzy, in a strangely pleasurable way, like sipping a forbidden drink.

Her own voice reached her ears as though after having traveled some distance. She slowed a little to steady herself.

"Mister Lancing seems to be missing his own party," she observed.

"*This* Mister Lancing is having a perfectly splendid evening," Quintin told her.

She laughed buoyantly. "Does your brother habitually do this—invite all the ladies in the county and then—," she snapped her finger, "—vanish?"

"He'll have an excellent reason when he returns. I have no doubt."

"I see many disappointed faces," Antonia remarked.

"Wildhearne is not easy to replace."

"It must be something very important," she said, "to keep him from his own entertainment."

"I have no doubt that it will be reasonably explained."

"No doubt," she laughed, and they swung back again into the gay dance, quickened by the pulse of the music and her own suddenly racing heart-beats.

It seemed to Antonia that the evening had stretched into a timeless space where hours were suspended and did not pass—there was a void, a pleasurable, provocative, atmospheric dwelling-place beautifully lighted and sustained and into and through which her body moved as though on tense strings manipulated by sensitive fingers to a murmurous, loving accompaniment.

Already she thought that they had danced for an hour, and that the music had grown more propulsive, and rhythmic, and stirring. The heat in her body burned with a steady interior flame that grew and glowed, and she felt it in her flushed face and stealthily in her limbs, which seemed nevertheless light and tireless.

"We are all very regretful about what happened tonight," Quintin said. He had been thinking about it all this time, Antonia perceived.

"Tonight?" Antonia repeated. "Tonight is—."

The word she wanted had been there when she started to speak and now it eluded her. It simply slipped away and mocked her from the far edge of her brain. What was tonight to her? It was all through her veins. It lighted her voluptuously from within. And it couldn't be put into words. At least, a word. It had slid off and was not to be recaptured. Antonia covered her confusion with a laugh and an appealing toss of her head. She had had nothing to drink. And yet she felt as though she had absorbed into herself the winiest of powerful intoxicants.

"You have many friends," Antonia remarked, abandoning all attempts to recover the thought that had evaded her previous efforts.

"I have few friends. They are Wildhearne's friends, for the most part, and family friends, such as Lady Earle—," Quintin replied to her observation.

"And which am I, Mister Lancing?" she asked, with a rising recklessness that was characteristic neither of Antonia nor, to be candid, of conventional young ladies of that day and time.

He looked into her face in the serious fashion that certainly, Antonia was sure, was part of his character, in fact, defined it fully.

"Aren't you," he said, "engaged to Dunstan?"

He had been trying to make her laugh, and now she *did*. "He *told* you? Dunstan told you that?"

"He'll wait the ten years when he'll be twenty-one," Quintin said. "Don't be surprised if he expects you to wait ten years, too."

"I have no reason," she said, "not to."

"There will be considerable changes in ten years," Quintin assured Antonia. "In Ireland and everywhere else."

“What kind of changes?”

“Some we won’t want,” Quentin said, and swung her more deeply into the dance. She allowed herself to submerge into the masculine rhythm of his slow-moving body, thinking of the changes that time would bring. To her. To him. How would Quintin change? Antonia wanted to ask him about that. It intrigued her. To Ireland.

She shuddered.

“Are you cold?” he inquired, and slowed and looked as if he were closely inspecting her features.

“I was thinking about Ireland.”

“What about Ireland?”

“The changes,” she said. “What changes did you mean?”

“We won’t like them.”

“What do you mean?” Antonia repeated.

“They’re happening around us,” he told her.

“You mean,” she pursued, “what happened to us tonight.”

“That’s part of it,” he replied, cautiously.

“There have always been highwaymen and hold-ups,” Antonia said. “What if there are more? That’s only a change in numbers, isn’t it?”

“They were not just highwaymen,” Quintin said.

“How do you know?”

“It was part of a pattern,” Quintin told Antonia. “The same thing has been repeated all over the county. And not only the county. All over. In Dublin, as well,” he said, “among the students.”

“Do the students hold up coaches?” she asked, “and break into houses?”

“The students support those who do.”

“Why?” she questioned him. Until now, she supposed, she had thought that she supported them,—

the changes that were coming—herself. But she was not sure. Some things frightened her. The changes that Quintin predicted would happen to her. What were they? And if she didn't approve of them—and couldn't support them—could she change back to the way she was? "Why support breaking the law?"

"The law, they will tell you, was not made by the Irish."

"Holding up people and breaking into people's houses, isn't that what the law forbids? What sort of law would approve of it?"

"There is no lawful way to bring about a revolution. Once the decision is taken and the first move made," he said, "you are breaking the law. And the strongest support for revolution is among the deprived, and fighting, like everything, costs money. And there is only one way to acquire money quickly, that is to take it away from those who already have it. And that," Quintin stated, "is what they are doing now."

"To me?" Antonia challenged. "And to Charlotte?"

"I have a feeling," Quintin told her, "that that was a mistake."

"A mistake," she echoed.

"I doubt if it will happen again."

"We are two women," Antonia said, "alone in a huge house, how can we feel safe there?"

"It won't happen again," Quintin stated, flatly.

"How can we depend upon it, Mister Lancing?"

She thought he answered, Trust me, but Antonia couldn't be sure, *she* might have been mistaken. There was a powerful chord as the music concluded and the bodies separated, slowly and reluctantly, and with a good deal of rustling and whispering of the

dressess of the ladies turning and relinquishing and being relinquished by their partners. So that Antonia could not be sure. Of one more thing. It was one more thing she couldn't be sure of.

For she could not be sure that the changes Quintin spoke about (*warned* about) actually were coming. She couldn't be sure that if they came she would welcome them and approve them. Antonia couldn't be sure of Quintin. What had he revealed to her in the length of a dance? She could not be sure that she heard what she'd thought she heard. *Trust me.*

It had never occurred to Antonia not to. Then why should he have told her to? It seemed to Antonia that her brain was on fire. Fire and ice. There was fire within her and her body appeared to her to be a casing of ice that enclosed the flames within it. She had never got really warm after the incident in the road. Her limbs still felt frigid and defiant of the heat of the crowded rooms. She wished for a fleeting instant that Quintin had not withdrawn his strong arms from around her. Her body required some additional support.

—XXVI—

Charlotte looked acutely at Antonia when she approached. "My dear," she said, "you're feverish."

Antonia laughed. She laughed exhilaratingly now, perhaps because of the splendor of the scene of which they were part, the ladies in diamonds and silks, the men in colored silks circling with the ladies around and around, as the room, too, seemed to be turning around and around.

"Ireland is changing," Antonia laughed. "I must change, too, or be left behind."

"You must stay as you are, Tony," Lady Earle said, severely. "Don't you dare change. I intend to remain just as I am, no matter what happens to Ireland. And I expect the same of my friends. They mustn't change," she went on, "and leave me to my own devices."

"What is all that about change, Lady Charlotte?" Wildhearne said, joining the company as casually as though he had been in the next room and not invisible for most of the evening. He had come up behind Antonia, and she turned at the sound of his voice.

She looked into his face—serious and thoughtful, yes, but, Antonia decided, in quite a different way from Quintin's. She did intend, really, to compare them. Yet her mind worked in its own fashion, gauging and comparing in a manner cool and almost

judgmental. Yes, she reflected, yes, Wildhearne was certainly handsomer than his brother, he was taller, slimmer, with the fine aristocratic legs that Charlotte had admired, he wore a finely-tailored clothes that beautifully set off his chest and torso and he had been shaved carefully and his silken hair was becomingly trimmed and brushed.

Antonia inspected him—had he not presented himself for inspection—and had to conclude that Ireland's changing would have no effect upon this leisured product of his class and breed. So unchanging are the pure lines of the blood that a creature of the process emerges looking little different from his brother-in-the-breed. Whether it was a hunting dog, a horse or a man—when impurity is bred out of them they tend to merge into a single, undeviating look, an image that remains until continuity is violated.

But the effect could only be brought about upon those who came along later. Nothing would change their exquisite symmetry as they stood before you, as Wildhearne was doing now, smiling in easy grace, lingering alongside Antonia and glancing down upon Lady Charlotte in the comfortable chair she managed to purloin for herself, from which point she could oversee every object and person in the room at the same time that she listened to the music floating over the heads of the dancers to her ears.

"Dear Wildhearne," Lady Charlotte greeted him. "There were many inquiries about you this evening."

"Good. Then I've been missed," Wildhearne said. He looked in the direction of Antonia. For assurance? Assessing her? She could not tell. In that way he was no more revealing than his enigmatic brother, Quintin. Yes, their blood-lines came together in that.

"You surely knew you would be. What host would not be?"

"Quite right. I am reminded that I must be making some changes myself. Perhaps adding a hostess," he jested, "to Lislaughton."

"And leave so many to be disappointed?"

"The world is a hard place."

"For some," Antonia put in.

"For some," Wildhearne agreed, pleasantly. He looked at her attentively. Speculatively, perhaps, Antonia thought. "But you are not among them."

"It may perhaps *seem* that I am not," Antonia said.

"I too, have had my disappointments," Lady Charlotte told Wildhearne, "as you know. But we were not speaking of ourselves. We were speaking of Ireland when you came in."

"Of course."

"At the same time," Lady Earle said, "we were wondering about you. Weren't we, Tony?"

"Your brother," Antonia told Wildhearne, "stood in for you."

"Quintin is always gracious. My brother does not like this sort of thing at all. He cannot follow music, you see," Wildhearne said. "It grossly handicaps him. As a consequence, he never dances."

Antonia's eyes were widening.

"Who was it, then," she wanted to know, "who danced with me?"

His pupils dilated now, equally. "Quintin? Did Quinton dance with you?"

"Your brother, Mister Lancing. He danced as well as any man present."

"Of course," Wildhearne said, "I haven't seen him dance since he was twelve. He must have im-

proved since then."

"You have evaded us long enough, Wildhearne. *You* must tell us where you've been for so long," Lady Earle commanded him.

"Not a stone's throw from where all our neighbors are dancing," Wildhearne told her.

"I am sure you are telling the truth," she said, doubtfully.

"An Irishman lies," Wildhearne said, "only when it can't be helped."

"You would not lie to me, Wildhearne," Lady Charlotte stated.

He laughed. "Certainly not, Lady Charlotte," he assented, "since you have the curious faculty of detecting a lie the moment it is formulated. For that reason I would never attempt it. It would take a bold man to try it."

She pretended to grumble. "Still it doesn't explain how you could be present and absent all at the same time."

"Lislaughton has a history of that. The Lancings, you know, are historic. Some of the early ones found their way back, even after they had been beheaded."

"Beheaded! Who would behead them?"

"There is nothing mysterious about beheading. It is a custom practiced in almost any epoch and continues right to our own day. Our cousins in France, for example."

At this moment a serving man approached Lady Charlotte and leaned and spoke to her in a low voice. The woman started and then turned her other ear to the man to hear him better.

"I am wanted," Charlotte announced, "in the sitting room." She struggled to extricate herself from the comfort of the chair and was helped to her feet by

Wildhearne.

"The host is told nothing of these matters," he said, and gave a cold glance at the back of the servant, who thankfully did not hear his words and luckily could not have been aware of the glance.

"Shall I come with you?" Antonia offered.

"No, my dear. You stay right there with Wildhearne. If he tries to leave, follow him. Perhaps then we will penetrate the mystery of where he was hidden for the past hours." Charlotte straightened and walked with deliberate steps in the direction taken by the man-servant.

Wildhearne directed his attention now to Antonia. "There is no mystery," he told her, "I am sorry to say."

"I would have said there was," Antonia said, boldly. "I think there is very great mystery indeed."

He listened to her words attentively, she saw. Wildhearne's absorption with her was perfect enough to turn the head of a susceptible young lady.

Antonia was not impressionable in that sense.

—XXVII—

“Won’t you sit down?” Wildhearne invited Antonia.

“Thank you,” she said, and remained standing.

“I must apologize for not being here to greet you.”

“There was a reception for us on the road. Did nobody tell you?” Antonia inquired.

“I heard about it a half-dozen times,” Wildhearne told her. “I owe you another apology.”

“Apologize to Captain Carney. He was taken out of his way,” Antonia said.

“I take it you were allright?” He glanced at her, evaluating, she thought, how she struck him. Antonia wondered if she seemed “allright”.

“I wasn’t frightened at the time,” Antonia said. “But I think I will be.”

“I’m sorry. I ought to have driven you here myself.”

“Are the roads always dangerous here?”

“The most exciting event at Lislaughton in the last twelve months has been the birth of a litter by the groom’s bitch Bertha.”

“I hope Bertha has recovered.”

“No doubt of it. She has settled down.”

“Did you hear,” she said, shakily, “that I’m engaged to Dunstan?”

“Lucky little wretch. Congratulations.” He added: “Shall I give you away?”

“Can you wait for ten years?”

“Can *he*?”

“He’ll be growing up—not waiting,” Antonia pointed out.

He was thoughtful, she saw. “Ten years,” he repeated, looking reflective. “In ten years what will have become of Ireland?”

She knew she could not have told Wildhearne what he wanted to know. Antonia was equally as interested in what would have happened to herself. And Wildhearne. And Charlotte. And Quintin. And the boy.

Dunstan alone would not have to change with and for changing Ireland. Change concerned her almost as much as the finality of things. “Here you change, too. Change your body for a soul and float free, free as an aroma to circulate among the flowers, the tree-tops, climbing the stratosphere into the blue, blue heavens, where the clouds in their fleece tumbled like playing lambs, dumb young lambs purified of every imperfection.

“Have you danced yourself,” Antonia said, “since you were twelve?”

Wildhearne turned quickly away from her and so little did she know the man who absorbed her and engaged her attention so effortlessly that she thought something beyond them had alarmed him, or that he had taken offense at her.

But he was only leading her into the hall where another dance was about to start up. It was a rigidly formal exercise in which couples lined up with a division between them—male on one side, female alongside him though separated by space. There may have been twenty couples on the floor and others came hurrying in.

The musicians struck a chord and the master-of-ceremonies called the turns, guiding the music and

the dancers. Down the hall the couples surged and then danced backwards and circled—the pair always close but never touching, each tantalized by the other's nearness, speaking when for a moment they were thrown together, communicating with their eyes, gestures and movements when the dance forces them apart.

Wildhearne danced extremely well, Antonia found out, demonstrating more familiarity with the rules of this dance than she was able to claim. Still, she was exhilarated by the sheer exquisiteness of the sounds made by the musicians and their instruments and the joyous rhythm of her limbs and muscles. If this was happiness, Antonia reflected, it was no wonder she couldn't recognize it.

When they talked together their words were brief and quickly broken into by the antic sounds from the musicians' corner.

"Are you well?" Wildhearne inquired, as they came close.

She smiled and nodded as they were forced to part.

"Thank you," she said, when they came together again.

He looked inquiringly at her, separated by space.

"—for a lovely, lovely evening," she murmured, when Wildhearne once again danced in close.

They were side by side once more for a radiant, buoyant moment.

"I didn't hear you."

He could have read it in her eyes, Antonia thought. He might have deciphered it upon her tremulous lips. Men were like that, she assured herself. They required words of you.

Revolution was a man's enterprise, and words were demanded. And there were more words to go

than revolutionary actions. Wolfe Tone was making speeches and trying to circumvent the action that his words led Irishmen to interpret as inflammatory directions. Rise! said his words, and cast off your oppressors. Behind and between and underlying the words was the warning: Don't change. Don't change too radically. Irishmen, beware, you will lose your shackles. They will take away your pigsty. The alley you are skulking in and which you inhabit will be appropriated by the military, by the police, by the pure in heart, by the survivors. You will lose it if you attack to defend it.

Words are like that. Men are like that. Politicians are like that. Tone roved through the country and found restlessness and left restlessness behind him as he traveled.

He talked to the Defenders. His words lectured them that all the actions the Defenders had taken was illegal, immoral and dangerous. What isn't dangerous? Love is dangerous. Living is dangerous. Birth is dangerous and time is most dangerous of all. That was it—time. Time was the promise that they all made. The kings and the dukes and the generals and the prime ministers; and the judges and the owners and the landlords and the brokers and the bankers and the priests and your father and your mother.

In time, they all promised, everything would change. Trust time. Ireland will change. Your life will change. Your place of living—your sty, your cellar, your alley, your square of pavement—will change. You will have a hut and a pig of your own, in time. It is a promise. Drop your clubs and your guns and your dangerous ways and join the good. The good believe in time. They credit the promises. They do what they are told.

—XXVIII—

Lady Earle had not returned by the time the dance had concluded and Antonia was concerned enough to ask Wildhearne if she should go to her, where Charlotte was supposed to be, in the sitting-room.

"Lady Charlotte is an incorrigible gossip," Wildhearne said. "You will find her surrounded by ladies, and certain men, regaling them with her dire experiences among the British."

"Dire experiences?" Antonia repeated. "Aren't the British supposed to be civil?"

"*We're* supposed to be civil, we Irish," Wildhearne pointed out. "On the basis of events," he said, "I beg leave to doubt it."

"You mean tonight."

"Tonight," he said, "and other nights and other days and weeks, there have been stabbings and stealing and break-ins and shootings between one group and another group—all Irish. We are more of a danger to ourselves than to our enemies. Every house," he asserted, "is in danger."

"Lislaughton, do you mean?"

"We haven't been violated here yet. We can defend ourselves."

"Defend yourselves. From whom? Those who call themselves the Defenders?"

"Whoever they are, the Defenders, Hell Fire,

whatever they're called, we'll defend ourselves with our own murderous weapons and they invade us at their peril."

"Is that wise?"

As always, the threat of violence filled her with apprehension. Freedom and the thought of freedom and men joined in the mystic bond of freedom thrilled her whole being through, and she longed to become part of it, to join the mystical circle, to draw from it its nobility, and power, and the ecstasy that resides within it. But blood sickened her. The sound of a shot drove her imagination beyond the limits of tolerance and she perceived in it a human death, the cessation of death, a creature emptying slowly and painfully of life.

Her brain accepted the rights of the wronged. Have not the Irish been wronged, and wronged themselves, for as long as there are centuries to record them? Revolution, she thought, should come about like a flower—a red rose—opening. Awakening. Its fragrance offered to the full winds, the breezes serenely touching the clover and sumac, the dreaming trees.

"Wise? We don't know," Wildhearne said, "until we are attacked."

"Do you expect to be?"

"Yes," he said. "No." He added: "That's exactly the way I feel about it."

"They prefer to set upon two woman alone on a dark road."

"Is that the worst of it?"

"It was for Lottie," she said. "And for me—"

"Yes, yes," he said. "Tell me about you."

"There isn't time," she said, and laughed in a way that changed the direction of his thinking.

"You must not expect to leave here tonight," Wildhearne told her.

"Isn't that a most unconventional way of extending an invitation, Mister Lancing?" Antonia inquired.

"What better way *is* there—with you here before me—and Lady Charlotte." He glanced around, looked carelessly and not too thoroughly over his shoulder. "Lady Charlotte will stay, too."

"Has Lottie said so?"

"She thinks more of Lislaughton than she does of Copsley."

"I am not so sure it's the house," Antonia laughed. Wildhearne, though, remained serious—as serious, thought Antonia, as his brother Quintin.

But why not, she inquired of herself, belatedly as it was? Why shouldn't she stay the night at Lislaughton? What was there at Copsley to bring her back to it, save Lottie? And Lottie would be with her here. There would be no doubt about that. Lottie would embrace any effort to absent herself from the great rattling manor of a place that afforded her neither joy no pride.

—XXIX—

The evening went on. There was furious activity. Some guests left. The carriages drove off into the night and there were jests about getting past the highwaymen on the roads, and, surprisingly, there were even fresh arrivals, friends of the hosts who, for perfectly acceptable Irish reasons, had not been able to appear earlier. So that, despite the departures, the house remained as it had been, animated with ladies flaunting their bodies in their colored silk gowns and men as manicured and barbered and tailored as their groomed background.

Antonia, who had started to go to Charlotte, found herself dancing, instead, with a high-spirited gentleman who smelled (pleasantly, she thought) of scent and wine. He was young, she saw, fresh-featured and as ardent as could be and she gauged that he must be married to one of the ladies who looked on at the dancers.

"Desmond?" her partner repeated, when Antonia told him her name, having to spell it for him, since his faculties could not easily grasp several syllables. "There was a family of Desmonds in Connaught, as I remember."

"I have no family," Antonia told him.

It was the truth. She sometimes found it hard to face. She had no family. The Desmonds in Connaught and everywhere else were no kin of hers.

There may even be, somewhere, an Antonia Desmond and though this aroused in Antonia a certain curiosity, she would not have undertaken an investigation.

"No family?" the gentleman repeated.

He looked helpless over Antonia's head; racking his brain for something comforting to say to the young lady he was dancing with. "Not even a mother and a father?"

"No father," Antonia said, with regret. "No mother. No family," she repeated.

"I have more than I need," her thoughtful dancing partner told her. "Let me give you some."

"Do you have their consent?" Antonia asked, gravely.

"All the same," the man said, lowering his tone, so that the music murmured sadly behind them, "I am sorry to hear that. "I am," he said again, helplessly, "sorry."

They danced for a moment in silence and—on his part—sympathy. Antonia usually did not intrude her family into her conversation. In the past—since the tragedy—she was able to elude the inevitable inquiry. She had practiced a certain vivaciousness, when she was around others (which she invariably was) so that they could not guess at her private grief and loss. These came back to her in the dark. They descended on her in her dreams. Sometimes she came awake in her dream in tears.

She only spoke of it now to the gentleman only because he was a stranger. As a stranger he was free to offer her sympathy without responsibility. Antonia could luxuriate in the hypnotic tempo of the dance music that, like a sustained reverie, like a protracted dream, floated her along a deepening sea

of song. The strings sang. The piano hummed beneath or behind the strings and all the instruments together yielded a poignant sigh of regret over unnamable things, buried emotions, passion and youth and time and the fading of love.

They did not speak for awhile, though the gentleman, Antonia knew, embraced silence reluctantly.

"Wildhearne," he said, unexpectedly, "has no family either."

"There is a brother," Antonia reminded him, "Mister Quintin Lancing."

The man almost stopped dancing and stared. "By God. Excuse me," he apologized, "so there is. Quintin."

"And Dunstan.-"

"Dunstan?" her partner repeated. "Is there a Dunstan?"

"There must be," Antonia smiled. "You see," she added, "we've just become engaged."

"That's fine," the gentleman approved. "That's fine." He queried, "When will the event take place?"

Antonia looked demure. "When he's older," she told him.

"Shouldn't wait until he's too old," he advised. "Habits, you know. An old man falls into habits."

"Oh, I'll see to it that he doesn't."

"Where is he now—" he looked all around the room.

"In bed, I believe. He oughtn't to be up after a certain hour."

He missed a step, and excused himself again. "Irish, is he?" Her partner looked at her closely. "You sure?"

"As Irish as I am. As we are," Antonia assured

him.

"I thought there might be a bit of foreign blood there. Foreigners do that, I'm told."

"Foreigners do what?" Antonia asked.

"A great many eccentric things. I can't say," he said. "I've never seen a foreigner. We don't get many out here. Everyone here knows everyone," he said. "Yeomen. They're all yeomen, you know. The county is proud of that. I'll wager your Dunstan is a yeoman," the gentleman encouraged her.

"I hope," she said, "he will be." She wondered what it was—a yeoman—and why it would matter so much.

"This is the county for it," he said, with approval. "I trust Dunstan—is that an Irish name—becomes a yeoman." He added, "I'm a yeoman."

"I might have known," Antonia murmured.

The gentleman looked pleased with her. "Why haven't we met?" he demanded. "Why has Wildhearne never done this before? Will you come to Shadows?"

"Shadows?"

"That's what it's called. About a thousand acres," he said. "Lots of snipe. Grouse. Plover. Do you shoot?"

Why should you shoot a plover? A snipe, she reflected, sounded hardly worth killing. And a grouse, thought Antonia, must be something you cuddled when you were in your nursery. She could not imagine putting a bullet into it.

She felt relieved when the music ended. The conversation with the gentleman yeoman had left her with conflicting sensations. A thousand acres. He seemed like such a young gentleman for so vast an expanse of Irish land. Ireland itself seemed—

alongside the countries surrounding it—as coming to not more than a thousand acres in size. She thought of those sparse acres, and the millions of Irish who were not yeomen like her dancing partner, and were deprived, by him, of the few acres they required for their mortal needs.

The gentleman called his estate Shadows and it seemed to Antonia that Ireland was overrun with shadows—the shadows like the highwaymen who mingled with the darkness and pounced on you as you passed.

There was a fire within her, too. Antonia had been experiencing it all evening, or ever since she arrived at Lislaughton. It must be the music, the dancing, the sparkling ladies, the giddy champagne, the meeting with Quintin, Wildhearne's absence and presence and moodiness, the formal-looking gentlemen in their evening clothes, with their informal manners and possessive ways around the bowl or on the dance floor.

The rooms were over-heated with tree-like logs burning like hellfire in the blazing hearth. Copsley was gray and chill as the grave—or as a typical Irish day—compared with the wanton abandon of the fireplaces at Lislaughton. Shadows. Lislaughton. She tried them on her tongue. There were shadows at Lislaughton, too, she thought. Why was Quintin so unknown to everyone? He had vanished almost as soon as Wildhearne had made an appearance. Where had he gone? Wildhearne hardly referred to him, and looked somewhat absent when Quintin's name was brought up.

It made you want to despair. There was no gain in saying such things to herself, Antonia decided. Yet who was there to say them to? Who would undersand

them like yourself? Who was there to listen to you, tolerate you, explain to you and observe the necessary discretion?

Charlotte. Her beloved Lottie, who had left her and gone off in answer to a summons that she did not see fit to reveal, not even to Antonia. No wonder, Antonia thought. Was it any wonder she felt on fire? And was it any wonder that shadows crowded her mind and shaped her emotions?

Antonia would have liked to tumble out all such thoughts to Quintin. To Wildhearne (although she felt she knew him less than Quintin). To Dunstan, who would understand her, she believed, best. If she knew where his room was she would have gone to him, put her arms around him, awakened him gently, kissed his cheek, or entered his dream. Yes, she would move like a quiet shadow into one of the child's pure dreams and exchange wisdom with him. Receive wisdom from him.

Yes. So overpowering was the thought that Antonia prowled for a moment from the hall to the (somewhat) smaller dining room which had been arranged like a salon with wines and card-tables and the atmosphere, to it, of carelessness and leisure. It hardly held her for a moment. She left it with but a glance and paused at the stairway. At the foot of the stairs it felt cooler than were the rooms she had just left. The top of the staircase beckoned Antonia. It would be heavenly cool up there, she was sure. The darkness above would ease and comfort her and erase the warmth like a heat burning outward from within her.

She placed a slippered foot on the step in front of her, and in the same instant heard Charlotte's confident voice, disembodied without Charlotte's own

commanding presence.

"Certainly Charles you cannot go without paying your respects."

There was a masculine grumble or rumble that Antonia smiled to herself in recognition of. Captain Carney's habitual manner of expression.

Antonia waited at the foot of the stairs for Lottie to come upon her.

Captain Carney appeared first. When he discovered Antonia standing as though to receive him his lean, shadowy face appeared to change shape. The smile that took possession of it altered his features, spreading them, wrinkling them, normalizing them, so that the stern, soldierly visage changed into a man's pleased expression at being surprised when it had clearly expected the opposite.

"Captain Carney?" A shadow. The Captain seemed like a shadow in the candle-light and the hearth-light. And Antonia? She thought she must appear to him like a shadow herself.

Behind him—a shadow, too—Lady Charlotte revealed herself. She was holding up the fur cloak that had been snatched from her back by the masked man on horseback.

"Captain Carney! Lottie!" Antonia experienced a moment of dizziness. She didn't understand. "Why?" she exclaimed. "Where?"

"I don't blame you, my child. I hardly dared believe it myself. Charles here—," Lady Charlotte gestured to embrace Captain Carney at her back. "I never dreamed I'd see it again," she said. "Those wretched creatures."—"

"They will be dealt with," Captain Carney assured her, moodily.

"But Lottie. How did it happen?"

"Charles here can tell you." But Charlotte gave the Captain no chance to explain. "A miracle," she declared. "It was a miracle." She stroked her fur affectionately. "I really never, never, *never* expected to wear it again—ever. And Charles just went out and found it again for me, the dear, good man."

"That means you caught them,-," Antonia exclaimed. "Those men!"

"It will be only a matter of time before I do," Captain Carney stated. We didn't catch anybody—yet. We came across one of their horses. He had gone lame, and they'd abandoned him, along with some stolen articles they probably couldn't carry, and Lady Charlotte's cloak was among them. No," Captain Carney repeated, "as to capturing any of them, we haven't yet had the opportunity." His earnest, weathered, soldier's face looked mournful.

"Never mind," Lady Earle consoled him. "As long as you get the stolen thing back, it hardly makes any difference whether you overtake the men who stole them—the wretches. They *can't* be Irishmen," Lady Charlotte asserted, with vehemence.

"Oh, they are Irish all right," Captain Carney said.

"How do you know?" Lady Charlotte challenged, "if you don't even know who they are?"

"We may not know *who* they are, or their leader, but we have considerable information on *them*."

"A leader? Is there only one leader?" Antonia queried. She felt relieved and had reason to be. Lottie had her luxurious cloak back. How could she have returned to Copsley clad only in her party gown? And a kind of relief, too, that she did not entirely understand or articulate. The man who had held up their

carriage had not been apprehended. Antonia told herself that she felt relief about this because she would not be obliged now to appear at a hearing and aid the prosecution in obtaining a prison term for an Irishman who stole out of motives that she felt a spiritual sympathy for.

The man on horseback had treated her, and Lottie, abominably, Antonia could not but remember, yet she would have been unhappy to have seen him apprehended. If there was a contradiction in this, and complexity, you must set it down as being the conflicting emotions of a young woman faced with confusing loyalties.

"We are beginning to conclude that there is," Captain Carney told Antonia.

"How can there be," Lady Charlotte demanded, "when that gang strikes anywhere in Ireland? How can a leader be here—in the south—and up there in the north—at one and the same time?"

"That's what makes them dangerous," Captain Carney responded. "Besides, much of the gang's activities are being undertaken below the Six Counties. Perhaps this is merely tactical. Perhaps they want to draw us in and then they may feel free to strike again somewhere removed from the south. But they may get a surprise instead."

"You mean," Antonia ventured, "you are planning to trap him?"

"There's no other way," Captain Carney told her, "to hunt a fox."

"The fox sometimes gets away," Antonia could not help reminding the Captain.

"Are you planning a fox-hunt, Captain?" Wildhearne inquired, coming up to them and joining them.

"I have too much work to do, Lancing," Captain

Carny told him.

"You seem to be performing it very pleasantly, indeed, Captain Carney," Wildhearne said.

"The Captain recovered my stolen cloak, Wildhearne," Lady Charlotte informed him. "Think of that."

"My compliments, Captain. How was it recovered? Did you overpower the brigands? Did you confront them with pistols drawn and with hosannas of God Save the King? How I wish I were there when you threatened the wretch with retribution if he did not relinquish milady's fur. I have an insatiable curiosity. Will you gratify it for me, Captain Carney?"

"If it is insatiable," Captain Carney told him, "it cannot easily be gratified. I know you are being facetious, Lancing. And in the sorry circumstances it is understandable that you should be. But Lady Earle here has suffered some hardship at the hands of those highwaymen. And Mistress Desmond must have been severely shaken by the events."

"Quite so. Hades knoweth no wickedness," Wildhearne rejoined, as though quoting, "like that of the Hell Fire Club."

"The Hell Fire Club?" Captain Carney repeated, looking as earnest as before.

"The Hell Fire what?" Lady Charlotte demanded.

"The Hell Fire Club," Wildhearne said. "I've decided that they're the Hell Fire Club I used to read about them in my youth. It went quite against the wishes of my tutor, I must assure you. I used to believe in it Captain," Wildhearne said, "but it was fiction. The books were all fiction, but to me they were fact. And I always expected The Hell Fire Club to materialize somewhere. And now I believe

that it has."

"The Hell Fire Club," Charlotte tested the words on her tongue. "The Hell Fire Club. Really, Wildhearne, it takes an act of imagination to comprehend it."

"Mister Lancing is finding humor in the fact that we are helpless, I suppose," Captain Carney said. "That may strike some observers as funny. Others may not be so ready to see it as something to laugh over."

"I took The Hell Fire Club very, very seriously indeed, Captain," Wildhearne protested.

"Come now, Wildhearne. Haven't you teased Captain Carney more than enough?" Charlotte reprimanded him, severely.

"Do you doubt that the band exists?" Antonia questioned Wildhearne.

"I did no more than Captain Carney. I heard him compare it to a fox-hunt. Perhaps the Captain was being facetious, too. The Hell Fire Club was a bloody band that terrorized the country in those sensational novels I could always get my hands on in my childhood. I can tell you, Captain, that a fox-hunt is nothing but a genteel exercise for the ladies of the gentry alongside the bullets in the back that The Hell Fires were credited with."

"That's right. He had a gun," Lady Charlotte said. "He waved it about so carelessly that I was afraid it would go off accidentally and kill us both in the road. You may call the Hell Fire Club if it amuses you, Wildhearne," Lady Charlotte addressed him, "but I, for one, am a great deal safer with Captain Carney and his men riding around the county. Where were you this evening, Captain? You might have captured those men who held up Antonia and me."

"Ah, there must remain secrets between the civilian and the military," Captain Carney told them. "I am very glad we didn't stumble on them when they were engaged in their thieving behavior, it might have been bloody, and could have been dangerous, for you. For you both," he added.

"That is very true, Wildhearne," Lady Charlotte assured him. "The Captain is quite right about the matter. And how glad I am to have my cloak restored to me!" she exclaimed, fervently. "Though I shall never wear it again without remembering the fear and the discomfort I experienced back there in the road."

"Poor Lottie," Antonia said. "She was forced to stand out there in the road without a covering. They had no pity, those men on their horses. I was too enraged to be really frightened by them."

"They frightened *me*, my dear."

"Oh, I was frightened, too. I admit it. Unlike you, Captain, I have never been that close to a loaded gun. I shall not soon forget the experience," Antonia promised.

"Nor will I," Charlotte put in.

"Would you recognize anything about them?" the Captain inquired. He seemed reluctant to end his mission and withdraw.

"One was masked, the one with the gun, who took Charlotte's cloak, and wanted her jewelry. "I still hear his voice in my head," she added, a little uncertainly.

"And you *would* recognize it," Captain Carney pursued.

"How can I be sure?" Antonia acted doubtful. She sought no confrontations, no recognitions, no relations at all with the Hell Fire Club, with whom, until

now, there had been, on Antonia's part, at least, only neutral sensations. She wished, she thought, that they had remained unchanged.

"You may well hear it again, then," Captain Carney warned her, soon."

Antonia put her hand to her cheek. "Oh, do you think—?" she said. The butler circling the room with a tray of glasses passed her just then. Antonia reached up and took a glass of wine and carried it with a shaking hand to her lips. A droplet of the clear, cool liquor moistened her dry lips. She hoped her trembling hand had not betrayed her true feelings to the two observant men and Charlotte, who would protect her, although she missed nothing. To her surprise, when she brought the glass down she saw that it was half-empty. Antonia gave a tremulous laugh. "Just thinking about it," she excused herself and her unsteady hand.

"To be sure," Captain Carney said, briskly. "It is late. My men are outside."

"Why not bring them in, Captain. They will scarcely be noticed," Wildhearne told him.

"It would be extremely difficult after that," Charles Carney said, "to get them back on their horses, I'm afraid." He addressed himself to Charlotte: "Should you want to return now to Copsley, we can see that you arrive there with no further incidents," the Captain promised.

"I've seen to it that there *will* be no more such incidents tonight," Wildhearne told Captain Carney. "The ladies have been invited to remain overnight at Lislaughton—and to return tomorrow at their leisure."

"And they have made up their minds?" prompted the Captain

"I adore seeing the sunrise at Lislaughton," Charlotte responded. There is not a window at Copsley where it is even visible."

"And Miss Desmond—?"

"Miss Desmond thanks the Captain gratefully," Antonia smiled confidently at Captain Carney. "But Lady Charlotte is my hostess. And *I* have never seen the sun come up over Lislaughton. And I've engaged myself to Dunstan this evening," she told the Captain gravely, "and must see that the gentleman does not change his mind, as I am told some do, in the morning. Therefore—"

"Excellent! They are *all* excellent reasons," pronounced Wildhearne. "And so good evening, Captain Carney."

"I shall be wanting an escort," Lady Charlotte called at the Captain's back, "in the morning."

Wildhearne extended his arms, one to each of the ladies. "Now which of you," he asked, "will gratify me with my first dance in more than an hour?" He was looking only at Antonia as he was speaking.

—XXX—

The dance was a waltz. The murmurous music in the background was both lyric and sad. Antonia and Wildhearne were able to talk now more easily than when they had danced together earlier.

"You appear to be very serious," Wildhearne observed. "Is it Lislughton that causes you to seem so—?"

"I *am* very serious, Mister Lancing."

"Have you met my brother?"

"I have, Mister Lancing."

"Quintin is very serious, too," Wildhearne said.

"Don't you consider yourself very serious, Mister Lancing?"

"Oh, I am very serious about myself," he admitted, "you will find."

"You teased Captain Carney," she accused, "outrageously."

"I? I hadn't thought I was teasing."

"About the Hell Fire matter?"

"They are also very serious men," he said.

"I have already found them to be so," she told

He was quiet a moment. The music rose in resonant volume. "I am sorry I have aroused in you such objections."

"I wasn't conscious," she half-protested, "of the objections you speak of."

"You think me not serious?"

"I found you to be quite, quite serious,"

He looked interested. "What else have you found me to be?" And he waited for her reply.

Antonia made him wait for a response. She cocked her head and pretended to consider her words. She found herself enjoying the colloquy between them, although the waltz gave her a feeling of melancholy that she could not altogether account for.

Perhaps, Antonia thought, it was Captain Carney. He had looked after her when she turned away with Wildhearne. She had glimpsed his features directed toward her.

"I have never thought about it very much, Mister Lancing."

"Then do think of me," he pretended to plead with her.

The waltz insinuated itself between them, and captured her mood. "You asked me about your brother just now, Mister Lancing."

"You needn't think about my family just now," he said.

"He is not much like you, I'd say."

"So would he. Emphatically. No," Wildhearne readily conceded, "we are not at all alike. Perhaps we will become more so as we grow older. That happens in families."

"Does it?"

"Why? Have I distressed you?" He looked into her face, studying it. It was enigmatic, he saw. Something must have upset her. That damn Carney. He must have alarmed her.

"No. You would never distress me, I know," Antonia told Wildhearne.

"It was something I said, perhaps uncon-

sciously."

"The music," she said, "is extremely sad."

"All the Irish songs are," Wildhearne pointed out. "Sad thoughts are much on our minds in this country."

"Perhaps Ireland discourages you."

"It does. Profoundly," he said. "Don't talk about Ireland. I'd rather you talked about me."

"Even though I hardly know you, Mister Lancing."

"Then talk about *yourself*," he commanded.

"Is that the price I must pay," she said, lightly, "for this dance?"

"I've never met a lady who did not leap at the chance to talk of herself."

"No doubt," she said, "they had more reasons than I have."

"You don't need a reason to talk about yourself. One helpless listener is usually all that is required."

"You hardly qualify as helpless."

"I *am*, in the hands of the experienced, such as Lady Earle. Usually, however, I try to hold my own."

"Why *did* you say the things you did to Captain Carney?"

"Did they offend you?"

"Offend me?"

"I don't give a farthing," Wildhearne told Antonia, "whether I offend the Captain."

"It was very brave of Captain Carney," Antonia maintained, "to track down those dangerous men."

"If he is smart as well as brave he won't catch them," Wildhearne said.

"Do you think he will be unable to?" Antonia questioned him.

“Unable to what?”

“Track down the—”

“Hell Fires?”

“Desperate men. Don’t you think they are—*desperate* men?” Antonia wanted to know.

“Of course. And we need an army of desperate men to overcome them and to counter their dangerous activities,” Wildhearne told her.

“What about desperate women? I think,” she said, “that Irish women are becoming as desperate as the men of Ireland.”

“No one has been up by an Irish woman yet—at least,” Wildhearne added, “not in Ireland, although every other kind of violent action has taken place.”

“You don’t take me seriously,” she accused him.

“The Irish,” he pronounced, so morosely that she could not imagine that he was being facetious, “are not a serious people.”

The waltz ended on them, as it must. The dance was over, succeeded only by the tender silence of the interval that followed up the melodic sound that drifted and floated and, like a wreath of smoke, dissolved, leaving only a faint evidence behind of its existence.

—XXXI—

“I’ve never seen you look so feverish, young lady,” Charlotte said, for Antonia’s ears alone. Naturally, her observation brought a resurgence of crimson into the delicate, modeled cheeks of her friend. All evening Antonia had been aware of the fire in her blood, the warmth of her flesh, the fever in her breast.

All evening the music caught her up in its wistful harmonies and laments. That was the reason, she told herself. How sad the music was as it softly and sweetly merged as one rapturous sigh about pure Ireland and Ireland’s brave sons, her grieving daughters. Melancholy herself, Antonia responded to the lyric melancholy of the songs. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

A mother would remark that you were flushed. A mother would put her cooling finger-tips to your lips, your flaming cheeks, your overheated brow. A father would look acutely at the sparkle intensifying in your eyes. Her friend, Charlotte, stood in for these.

“I feel wonderful,” Antonia assured Lady Earle.

“So do I,” Charlotte confided. “Whatever I feel is always improved at Lislaughton. Perhaps,” she told Antonia, “we’ll all be quarantined here, and we won’t have to return to Copsley.”

“You adore Copsley, Lottie. And so do I.”

“I promise to marry Wildhearne,” Charlotte said,

"if he should ask me now."

"Perhaps he will," Antonia said.

"And you, Tony, would not mind?"

Antonia faced Charlotte. "No, indeed. Should I?" she asked.

"All women find Wildhearne perilous attractive. And that's not even taking Lislaughton into account."

"I adore Lislaughton."

"You told me you adored Copsley," Charlotte accused.

"A woman—an Irishwoman—is capable of adoring two or three or more things," Antonia said.

"I am an Irishwoman and I have a faithful heart," Charlotte said. "How do you feel about Quintin?"

"I don't love either of them," Antonia maintained, "as much as I love Dunstan. And he loves me. He said so."

"He is Irish. And pure male. And he will lie to you," Charlotte warned. "He will break your heart, and grow up. He will join the army—or go to sea—or become a revolutionary. If there were only," Charlotte said, "a way to keep them from growing up."

"You are serious tonight, Lottie."

Charlotte looked around at their luxurious surroundings. "Seriousness always comes over me with a change of scene," she said. They stood just to one side of the guests who were getting into their cloaks and coats and going out into the deep, moonless night with its back-drop of black trees, the leaves purling among the branches like a stream going over the rocks, whispering and sighing.

Wildhearne had been swallowed by his responsibilities as host, shaking hands with the husbands and going out and standing among the carriages, cal-

ling out to the departing passengers and occasionally offering directions to the drivers. The horses emerged reluctantly from the stables and recoiled from the layer of mist they were forced to penetrate. Their little outcries were answered by the wakeful animals in the stalls, and there was a rustle of confusion on the opulent grounds where the house flung its ponderous shadow into the enclosing void.

"The fireplaces are lit for Lady Earle, ma'am," one of the girls told Charlotte, "and the one in Mistress Desmond's room is ready, mum," she added.

"I have no room yet," Antonia protested.

"This way, then, ma'am," and the girl—a child—a few years older, Antonia thought, than Dunstan, led them—Antonia and Charlotte—along a hallway, then climbed to a landing and stood outside a door, which she now opened. "This one is Lady Earle, ma'am and th' other is Mistress Desmond."

The child bent a knee—a half-curtsy, something like a genuflection—and went on silent feet into and out of the rooms, then took leave of the two ladies who remained side by side to talk for a moment before retiring.

"Shall you be all right now, dear?" Charlotte inquired, looking anxious, as though Antonia were a ward, or even more valuable, someone delicate and to be sheltered.

"Of course, darling Lottie. I'm as strong as as Columbine," she said.

"Don't admit it then, dear. Ladies are supposed to be fragile and clinging."

"I shall practice as hard as I can to be," Antonia vowed.

"You can be as strong as you like. You *look*

fragile, and men will be affected by that.

"I don't believe you see me the way men do, dear Lottie—"

"Men are blind," Charlotte snapped. "They need help to find what's there in front of them."

"You are too hard on men, dear Lottie. One of them must have disappointed you in the past. Will you tell me about it sometime?"

"It's too late to tell you about it now. I would only tell you about it, in any case, as a warning."

"A warning? Dear Lottie. Do I need a warning?"

"You are intelligent enough my darling Tony to need no warning from me. What dear apartments these are," Charlotte exclaimed. She stood in the door way and the firelight glanced off the walls and flickered across the faces of Antonia and her friend. "I feel more at home here at Lislaughton than I do anywhere in Ireland. And now," she said, to Antonia, "that I've seen where we sleep, I shall just steal down and say night-night to dear Wildhearne. Poor man. All his guests are deserting. It must make him feel unwanted. It would *me!*"

"I must disagree with you, darling Lottie. I do not believe that it is in Mister Lancing's nature ever to feel himself unwanted."

—XXXII—

And now she was alone at last in the apartment prepared for her by the little maidservant whom Wildhearne had no doubt scrupulously instructed. In the apartment next to Antonia's, Charlotte had returned, Antonia detected, and felt drawn to go to her dear friend from some more of the talk that she, and Lottie, too, found so exhilarating.

But there was a strange weakness and unwillingness, a weariness in her bones and limbs, and she felt instead grateful to the comfort-chair into which she settled her throbbing body.

What has happened to you, Antonia questioned herself, severely?

However, if there were an answer it did not announce itself to her. Whatever it was, it kept Antonia from moving for an hour from the chair. The fire burned in the fireplace and sent its warmth in waves yet she hardly felt it against her cheeks, for already they were raging with an inward heat of their own.

Antonia, with some effort, studied herself and discovered about herself a languidness that weakened her woefully after the curious tension that had sustained her all through the evening of dancing and conversation. It was probably, Antonia supposed, meeting those men in the road. She may have been the only citizen in Ireland who had, until this night,

never faced a loaded gun, and it, perhaps, had shaken her powerfully.

If so, it showed her a picture of herself that was passingly strange. For Antonia had always regarded herself as without fear. And now she learned that it was only because she had never before been so exposed that she could boast of courage. She tried to reject that as not accurate. It is not an accurate portrait. Not of me. I can stand up to guns and punishment, and I must, Antonia told herself. I must because of my inheritance.

Because she admired bravery in others. Even the two riders who had stopped their carriage on the road and forced them, Antonia and Lottie, to get down on the ground. You could not say that they were not courageous men, men with a ferocious, desperate, perhaps despairing, courage that would be dangerous for others to disregard.

They had stood in front of the plunging horses and arranged everything coolly. There were risks. Someone might have put a soldier into the carriage with a rifle ready to go off as soon as it was aimed.

And there *had* been soldiers in hot pursuit not far behind them. The shots sounded and the men had fled on their horses. They might have been hit by the bullets and killed before they fell under their horses' hoofs. Antonia sat shuddering alongside the fireplace. They were desperate men, she told herself again, Antonia thought, I can understand desperation. If you have nothing else you must look within yourself and rescue from there whatever of value you find.

The logs in the fireplace sighed and snapped, like smothered shots. The fire. Hell Fire. Fire would always be exactly that to Antonia, the fires of hell.

Fire had claimed her vibrant mother. Her young, buoyant father. The Hell Fire.

Wildhearne, she thought, could not have realized what fires he was reaping, in her heart, in her nature, in her desperate or despairing remembrance, of the flames that had consumed in its raging heat the two lives that had given her own life sustenance and importance, and abandoned her to her loss.

I will not think of it now, Antonia told herself, fiercely. But the flames in the fireplace raised wave upon wave and became an image of the hell fire that had stolen upon them the way the gunmen on their horses had cunningly descended upon the carriage, then revealed themselves when it was too late for self-protection.

Antonia sat looking into the fire, her eyes large with the vision she carried inside her and which she occasionally permitted herself to glimpse, as now, alone in this comforting gloom. There was something remote, contained, sealed, almost secret and personal about a room like this at night, ancestral, and seasoned with the long, legendary history of the Lancings. They had walked in Ireland when the kings lived and ruled and rode over mortals with the cruelty of tyrants.

Saints, martyrs and kings had once moved among us, Antonia sat thinking, the way we live and move among each other. The fire made her dream. The flames hypnotized her. She could not look away. Trance-like, she sat and entered the spell of the room. It was like sleep. She sat and dreamed before the fire and only when it began to flicker and darken did she rise and undress for bed.

Moving dream-like around the room so silently that in the passageway or in the room alongside her

where Charlotte was, nothing could be heard, Antonia began to remove her dress and shoes and stockings. In her underthings she looked girlish and young, and when she let her hair fall around her breasts and shoulders she seemed not to have changed at all, in the glass, from when she was being tutored at thirteen by a governess. What was her name? Saying goodbye, they had sworn never to forget each other, never. And Antonia never would. No, she would never forget her beloved Miss Quinn. Nancy Quinn. That was it. Miss Nancy Quinn. They had sworn a blood oath to love each other for life.

Now in the looking-glass in this apartment at Lisleigh, about a decade older than the eleven-year old girl who had her heart broken for the first time when she had been left behind by Miss Quinn, Antonia studied her reflection. No, she did not look now like the women who had danced earlier with Wildhearne and Quintin, and had disagreed strenuously with Captain Carney and who had given support, during the hold-up, to her friend, Lottie.

In the glass she appeared to be closer, in years, to Dunstan. In some ways she might have been Dunstan's slightly older sister. For the moment the woman she was had vanished or was in hiding, she was invisible, and this child-like creature in sensible underthings stood before her reflection until it swam and blurred before her eyes. Then she blew out the candle and slipped with relief under the blankets.

She lay back on the austere pillow—both mattress and pillow were stone-like and unyielding—and welcomed the darkness. In minutes she was breathing regularly and with scarcely any transition between sleeping and waking she entered at once a waiting, troubled dream.

—XXXIII—

When Antonia opened her eyes the sun was half-way across the floor and the room looked large and bright with it. She told herself that she must have overslept and her first impulse was to leap up, call into Charlotte's room and talk about the events of the evening.

Antonia felt fully rested now and somewhat abashed that she had slept so late the first time that she had been asked to stay overnight in the house where she was no more than a stranger, the friend of a friend.

What must Wildhearne be thinking of her? What would Quintin think? She struggled to sit up and then sank back upon the pillow, suddenly breathless. Her heart pounded and she felt dizzy.

The door opened and instead of Charlotte, whom Antonia somehow expected, a strange woman entered her room. Without glancing toward the bed, the woman went across to the dressing-table, where she did something with her back turned upon Antonia. Antonia had only glimpsed her features, a pleasant, middling Irish face that seemed reassuring, even though her presence here in Antonia's apartment was unexplained.

Perhaps, thought Antonia, she was another guest of last night—a stranger like Antonia herself—who had thought she was in her own room when she had accidentally entered Antonia's. Antonia hesitated to

surprise and alarm the stranger. She would have liked to warn the woman of her own presence in the bed but refrained because it surely would startle this proper-seeming lady. And so she lay looking at the back of the woman who appeared to be absorbed in something that kept her from being aware that she was in the wrong room.

The woman must have glanced into the mirror and seen Antonia staring at her. "You're awake!" she exclaimed, softly.

"I must have been more tired than I knew last night," Antonia attempted to explain. "How late it must be."

"Don't bother about the time, dear," the woman said. "How do you feel?"

"How do I feel?" Antonia blankly repeated.

"You look much better this morning," the woman said. She was reassuring to look at and to hear. She had a small smile at the corner of her mouth that made her appear constantly pleasant and approving. "How did you sleep?"

"I just awakened. I'm so ashamed of myself. I don't think I've ever slept so late in my life."

"Don't talk," the woman said, like a nurse. "Don't tire yourself."

Antonia stared at the woman. "Tire myself," she repeated.

"You may think you are strong but you're still weak," the woman told her.

"Isn't there a mistake?" Antonia queried. "What do you mean," she wanted to know, "*tire* myself?"

The strange woman came toward the bed with a tall glass of something colored and powerful-smelling. "You're to take this," she ordered.

"But *why*?"

“The doctor prescribed it for you when he was here.”

Now Antonia was certain that her visitor was mistaken. “Surely,” she protested, “you can’t mean me. I’ve only been here since last night. There’s been no doctor. I’m perfectly allright. Isn’t there—it *must* be,” she told the woman, “somebody else.”

The smile around her mouth gave the woman an agreeable appearance. “Oh, he was here right enough, the doctor.” She added, “He *said* you’d come out of it.”

Antonia made no effort to conceal her bewilderment. “I don’t know what you mean,” she protested.

“But you *must* not tire yourself.” She did comforting things to Antonia’s pillow and covers that gave Antonia a feeling of welcome relief, though she had not even known she was uncomfortable. “First thing you know you’ll have another spell, and you’ll have to be taken care of again.”

“Who are you?” Antonia inquired.

“Here, you take this now,” the woman directed, and she raised Antonia so that Antonia could drink the mixture that the woman had prepared for her. “I am Miss Noble,” she introduced herself. “I’ve been nursing you,” she announced.

“*Nursing* me? Why would I need someone to nurse me?”

“You’re overdoing it,” warned Miss Noble. “You don’t want a relapse, *I* think,” she told Antonia. “Do you?”

“Of course not.” Antonia added, “I don’t know what you mean—a relapse? Do you think that I am sick?”

The woman studied Antonia critically. “Your color has improved, it is considerably better this

morning, better than it's been in days," she pronounced. "You lost a little weight, I think. But you're still weak," the woman said, "and it shows."

"What do you mean, better than it's been in *days*? What did you mean?"

"You *must* drink this, the woman gently persisted, and got Antonia to swallow the stuff in the cup. It tasted no worse than it looked and, like a school-girl, Antonia made a face over it and shuddered. "Come, now. It doesn't taste all that wicked," the strange woman said.

But Antonia was not thinking about the evil-tasting medicine. She had no recollection of what the woman was referring to. Antonia had gone to bed late last evening and awakened late today and now she learned that somewhere—between last night and this morning—a doctor had been in to prescribe for her, and that, instead of the several hours that she thought herself to be sleeping, a few days had actually passed, days that had slipped by and which she had had no awareness of.

"How can that *be*?" Antonia questioned, aloud.

"It'll all come back to you, child," Miss Noble assured Antonia. "Now you need some rest.," and she slid a thermometer between Antonia's lips. "That'll keep you quiet," she said, and took Antonia's pulse. When she removed the instrument from Antonia's mouth she studied it and shook it down. "Well, your fever is not as high as it was," the sister told her. Still, the doctor wouldn't approve your bouncin' around so. Be still now," she admonished, "and leave nature take its natural course."

Antonia submitted weakly to the woman's ministrations. The woman had reluctantly betrayed enough

about her condition for Antonia to comprehend at least that she had been sick—she wondered now for how long—sick enough for a doctor to have been brought in and to have Antonia nursed back to her present and conscious state. Now as she lay languidly on her back in bed, having taken her medicine and been soothed by the skilled hands of this woman who had been at Antonia's side unknown to Antonia for unnumbered hours, Antonia recognized that indeed there *did* appear to be something strange about her condition.

When she had opened her eyes it had surprised her that she had not been able to leap out of bed, as Antonia was accustomed to do, even at Copsley, and even now after the extreme shocks brought about by the deaths of her parents. She had had difficulty raising herself, and after the effort her heart had beat somewhat wildly in her breast.

And Antonia remembered her sensations on the dance floor and afterward—her cheeks had felt like flames, she had been alternately laughing and serious, even solemn, and had gone to bed in so trance-like a state that she could scarcely today recollect the moment.

"The doctor will tell you all you need to know," Miss Noble advised her. She pretended—like Antonia's governess—to scold the girl. "And keep your covers over you. Do you want to have a relapse?"

It was not a question, of course. Of course Antonia did not want a relapse, a relapse to what she did not know, could not imagine and was therefore unable to be frightened of. And then—though the room seemed to be the one she had gone to bed in the night she and Charlotte stayed over—Antonia could not be entirely sure.

"Am I still at Lislaughton?" she inquired.

"You couldn't be moved," the nurse said. "But nobody at all wanted you to be. The doctor ordered that you stay just where you are, at Lislaughton, as you said, Miss Desmond, with your friend, Lady Earle."

"Where *is* Lady Earle? "Is Lady Earle still at Lislaughton?"

"Lady Earle stayed with you a day and then went back to Copsley for awhile. She is returning to Copsley today, I believe, though I might be wrong, and I oughtn't to be sayin'. But she's that anxious about you she won't be stayin' away long, that's my guess," she said.

"Darling Lottie—"

"That's right, Miss. Close your eyes now."

Antonia, to her surprise, and like the little girl ~~she~~ had seen herself as being standing before her reflection in the glass, did exactly as she was told.

Somewhat sleepily she closed her eyes. Immediately the sunlight slipped into the darkness and the day turned into the night where dreams and nightmares lurked.

She did not want to enter it yet. Antonia tried to open her eyes once again. to delay the sister at her side, to win from the woman a few more particles of the information she so reticently divulged.

But her pupils resisted her efforts and she sank into sleep gratefully enough, as into a pair of enclosing arms. or into a warm pool that lapped at her heavy limbs and turned them as light again as the sleepy Irish air

—XXXIV—

Antonia awakened deliciously refreshed and strengthened by this period of untroubled sleep. She opened her eyes to see a boy's face brought down close to her own.

"You're awake! You're awake!" Dunstan cried.

Antonia smiled, happy to see Dunstan, and glad to be back in the light, freed of the darkness of sleep, however wholesome.

"I was just going to leave," the boy said. His face was white, she saw, and taut. "I'm not supposed to be here," she confided.

"No? Why not?"

"Wildhearne says you're not to be disturbed. And Miss Noble shoos me out when she comes. And the doctor."

"Goodness," Antonia laughed.

"You won't die?" he said, anxiously. "Will you?"

"No. I won't die."

"Promise," Dunstan urged. "Promise me you won't die."

"I promise. I won't die," Antonia repeated. "I like it too much here."

"So do I," Dunstan said. "I'll help you get well," he announced. "We'll take walks together. I found a rock yesterday," he told her, "where there are about hundred grasshoppers."

She did not let him see her shudder. "Grasshoppers."

"I've never seen so many grasshoppers," Dunstan said, "under one old rock."

"What were they doing there?"

"That's what grasshoppers do," he said, "they cling together that way."

"I thought they hopped."

"I guess girls don't know much about grasshoppers—"

"I'm sorry. But I never lived in the country, Dunstan. And there weren't many grasshoppers where I grew up."

"There *weren't*?" His pupils widened as he tried to comprehend the kind of place anybody lived that didn't have grasshoppers. "You're white," he said. "I never saw anyone so white."

"Am I?"

"I am?"

"I was afraid you were going to die." Then he brightened. "But I knew you wouldn't," he said.

"No. I had no intention to."

"They said you had something with a *Pneumo*—something."

"Pneumonia? Is that what I had!"

"Pneumonia. That's right. I can't spell it. What is it?"

"Don't ever get it," she warned Dunstan.

"I'd rather I had it," he said, "than you."

"That is very sweet of you, darling Dunstan. But you must promise that *you* will never get it."

"I'm never sick," he stated cheerfully. "I once had to stay in bed like you because I twisted my ankle. I hated staying in bed. I used to get up when the doctor left."

"That was naughty of you, Dunstan. Suppose your ankle hadn't healed."

"It's all better now. Will you go for a walk with me?"

She looked startled. "When?" she asked. "Now?"

"No. You still got p'monia. You can't even get out of bed, Miss Noble says."

"Dunstan," she commanded, "tell me, how long have I been this way? In bed," she explained. "How long *has* it been?"

"Since you came here, since the night you came here," he informed her, "with Lady Earle."

"And how long has that been? What day is it?" she persisted.

"Today? It's Wednesday," he told Antonia.

She gave an exclamation. "I've been in bed then," she said, "since Saturday."

"It seems longer," the boy said.

"Bless you, Bless you, Dunstan."

"Are you religious?"

"We're Irish, Dunstan. I've heard it said that God is one of us."

"*Irish?*" he said.

"Never mind. Never mind about that, Dunstan. I must get out of bed soon. I must go back to Copsley." She added: "Where is Charlotte?"

"Lady Earle?"

"Yes, Yes. Where is she, Dunstan?"

"Today she's back at Copsley. But she'll be here again later. She was here this morning. She stayed here last night. She got here yesterday. I guess," Dunstan said, "she lives in both places." His eyes glowed. "I'd like to do that."

"Lady Earle can do anything," Antonia told him.

“Even be in two places at the same time, which is impossible, Dunstan.”

“When can we go for a walk?”

“I don’t believe Miss Noble would approve just yet,” a voice said from the doorway. The door had been left open by either Miss Noble or the impetuous Dunstan. It was Wildhearne standing on the threshold. “Dunstan, why are you here?”

“I want him here. I *need* him here,” Antonia half-pleaded.

“I didn’t awaken her,” Dunstan protested. “She just opened her eyes when I was standing here.”

“*Don’t* send him away—please.”

“He has his lessons to do,” Wildhearne said. “You should be at your books, Dunstan,” he told the boy. “Quintin reports that your efforts at learning have been flagging of late. As long as that is the case,” Wildhearne said, “you had better stay in your room with your studies.”

“What do I have to study for? When I grow up I’m going to be a coachman.”

Wildhearne smiled at Antonia. “Dunstan at present likes and admires Tom, the coachman better than any of us here at Lislaughton. I can see why. Certainly Tom has his fast horses and he is never in one place. And, of course, he doesn’t have to bother with books. I think Tom has a pleasanter life than I have myself. But I can’t take his job and he won’t do mine.”

“When do you work?” Dunstan wanted to know.

“That’s enough. Now, go back to your rooms,” Wildhearne ordered. “And recite your studies aloud. I shall be passing there and will listen attentively to see if you are carrying out my directions.”

“Goodbye, Miss Desmond. Wildhearne says

must go to my rooms now and study. He's my guardian, so I've got to do what he says. Until I get married," he told her. "When I get married I shan't need a guardian and I can go anywhere and stay up as long as I like and throw out all my books."

Wildhearne gave his full attention now to Antonia after Dunstan left, dragging his heels all the way through the hallway. "What can we do about the very young, Miss Desmond? I'm doing *my* best. But is it enough, do you think? I used to be one myself but I am afraid I have forgotten. Perhaps your memory is better than mine. He seems to be as attached to you as he is to Tom the Coachman." But Wildhearne did not let her reply. He was not, after all, interested in Dunstan. He had come to Antonia's apartment for purposes other than Dunstan. "How are you feeling now, Miss Desmond?" and the inexplicable change in his tone—an alteration between the brisk and the tentative—drew Antonia's attention to it. "You had all of us very concerned about you."

Antonia faced him honestly. "I never dreamed I would cause you so much trouble," she said. "I would never have come. I would never have consented to stay—if I'd know." She added: "You must forgive me, Mister Lancing."

"There's some color in your face today," he observed, leaning above her.

The color he had remarked on in her face deepened. Antonia knew just why the crimson was there in the first place. "I really don't have anything to go on. I am told that I slept for almost four days. I don't remember feeling bad. I don't recall anything about being sick. And how can I tell anyone that I am well? I have been feeling the same in all circumstances."

"You had a high fever. Lady Charlotte stayed here with you and said you talked in your sleep."

"Oh, dear."

He smiled coolly down at her. "You were delirious." Wildhearne informed her. "She couldn't make out a word."

Antonia laughed. "I ought to feel relieved."

"You would never have said anything indiscret."

"Perhaps," Antonia said, drily. "But I am just as happy that I didn't make myself clearly understood, although Lottie," she added, "knows more about me than anybody."

"We'll have to wait then until Lady Charlotte talks in *her* sleep," Wildhearne said.

"She will be back here today—Lottie?"

"I haven't seen her myself. I suppose we pass messages to and about each other. Yes, she is supposed to return to Lislaughton. I believe she regards it as her duty to see that you are not left too long alone in this bachelor environment."

"I quite appreciate that. That's why I ought to return to Copsley with Lottie when she comes."

"You want to get away from us," Wildhearne accused.

"I wouldn't have put it that way, Mister Lancing.

"You would be more comfortable here, Miss Desmond."

"Not if I were a burden, Mister Lancing."

"Has anyone conveyed to you that you were, Miss Desmond?"

"It wouldn't have to be conveyed to me, Mister Lancing. I think I am sensitive enough to determine it for myself."

"The doctor would have to be consulted, If he

consents to see you moved."

There was an impatience in Antonia's tone that only revealed itself to her when she spoke. "I am fully recovered. I feel perfectly strong. In fact, I think I will get up now, Mister Lancing."

"The doctor will be here again in a day or so," Wildhearne said. "You might wait until then."

"*In a day or so*—I feel as though my life were slipping away—a day or so at a time. I have been in this bed since Saturday—this is the *fifth* day that I have been sleeping like this—I remember nothing—nothing at all—about anything whatever. I am really very impatient with myself, Mister Lancing. You have encouraged me to act like a ninny. What must Lottie really think of me, sleeping for five days, as though I were some freak of history?"

"Lady Charlotte only wants you to get well—as I do—as we all do."

"I am well. I declare myself well again. And I shall return to Copsley as soon as I can."

"Dunstan will be very disappointed."

"I shall write to him. Perhaps," Antonia added, "you will give him permission to visit me at Copsley."

Wildhearne looked down at her with his vivid gaze but Antonia was making the effort at the moment of straightening her spine so that she could convey the image of strength and health that she had made claim to. "Miss Noble will disapprove, I'm sure."

"Miss Noble may feel proud of what her nursing has accomplished," Antonia said. "I owe her more than I can repay."

"No, no. You must remain for a while at Lisloughton," he said.

"You haven't said why."

"Suppose you have a relapse."

"I don't intend to."

"It would be attributed to my carelessness or indifference."

"By whom, Mister Lancing? And would it matter?"

"By myself, Antonia." And it would matter desperately, a man in love with her would have put it to her, and insured that Antonia would stay where she was, for as long as was necessary. We don't know and so can't say whether Wildhearne was in love with Antonia but if he was, he did not know how to reveal it to her, though he had her full attention.

To be fair, Wildhearne was not used to being opposed. When he spoke to you of your own good he often demanded your gratitude, rather than securing your understanding. He was both sensitive to your sufferings and insensitive of the way he chose to assuage them. A very healthy man himself, who had cried once only, when a pet frog had been spirited away from him by a trusted tutor at the instance of Wildhearne's father, Wildhearne had not the sympathy immediately recognized and succumbed to.

So far from succumbing, Antonia was rising from her bed, despite the presence of a male in her private apartments. Wildhearne started to withdraw, moving backward from the bedside as Antonia sat up, the scarlet back in her cheeks, though not because of pneumonia, or whatever it was that had kept her down upon the pillow during the few days of golden weather that Ireland had been exposed to.

"You have been most kind, Mister Lancing," Antonia said, in dismissal.

"Goodbye, Miss Desmond. I shall give instructions to the Miss Noble that you are leaving. She will

be disappointed, I am sure," Wildhearne said. "I think she was beginning to like it here at LisLaughton."

When Wildhearne withdrew, Antonia threw aside the covers and started to rise from the bed. At once all the strength and resolve she had been filled with as she had talked to the squire of Lislaughton appeared to her to have vanished.

For a moment she stood up but felt fearful about taking a step away from the warm haven that she had just vacated. Antonia was forced to hold onto the side of the bed with both hands, so close did she come, she thought, to falling.

There was a lightness to her entire body, starting in her heart, almost the feeling of intoxication without its accompany pleasure and euphoria, that was puzzling to her, and unfamiliar to her experience. Her body had never acted in such a way before. A feathery lightness seized possession of her body and threatened to upset her if she persisted in holding herself upright.

Antonia stood a little breathlessly alongside the bed and fought to maintain her balance. She had imagined herself to be strong, and recovered from the illness that had caused her to lose consciousness, and that had kept her a convalescent throughout all those days.

But she knew now that she was not well, not yet. The lightness in her head and the weakness of her body had changed her chemistry, so that it seemed to Antonia that she would be endangered if she were to venture further and get into her clothes. Even this simple demand upon her powers—getting into her dress—surfaced in Antonia's mind as an exertion of super-human proportions. She made no attempt yet

to act upon it, waited until her strength returned and the lightness she was experiencing subsided, but—on her feet—the feeling she had was intensified, and so she sat down upon the bed.

When the woman who nursed Antonia came in—probably dispatched to the room by Wildhearne—it was to help Antonia back into bed, instead of into her clothes. Antonia lay back gratefully as the woman drew the bedclothes back up around her and made her comfortable again.

“Thank you,” Antonia said. She felt already exhausted. How long, she wondered, must she remain like this, helpless this way at Lislaughton? The woman’s face—middle-aged and expressive of nothing but sympathy—looked for a moment anxious. But she would do nothing to alarm her patient.

Looking into the woman’s face, Antonia tried to feel reassured. Nothing will happen to you, Antonia read there in the woman’s features. You will be looked after. You do not have to get up now. You will not have to leave Lislaughton. Here you have friends. Friends like me. And Dunstan. And the horses, and all those who know of your illness, and serve you. And Wildhearne?”

Why did she put Wildhearne last? The question asked itself, but no answer made itself manifest. Like dressing herself, and riding back to Copsley, which would have been punishing and exhausting, the struggle to find an answer was eventually too much for Antonia’s limited strength.

When the woman got through straightening the bed-clothes and settling Antonia back upon the pillow, sleep rose up and overwhelmed her weak defenses, so that Antonia did not even hear the door close when the sister concluded her errand and—as silently as possible—left the room.

—XXXV—

“You’re not tired already?”

Even if she were, Antonia would rather expire there in the Irish sunlight than admit it to a conceited male. Tired already! Although she felt her heart beating rather too rapidly in her breast, and she was forced to move at the slowness of convalescence, Antonia continued to walk alongside Dunstan, trying to match his bold stride.

“Don’t mind about me,” she said, bravely, concealing—or attempting to conceal—the fact that her breath was coming alarmingly fast. She did not trust herself to say more.

“We can stop for awhile,” the boy offered, “and rest.”

“Not unless *you’re* tired,” Antonia said.

That set him off. Dunstan began to run ahead of her and left Antonia to catch up—if she could. She was able to draw breath now, and even to slow down, without Dunstan beside her, ready to remark on her effortful movements.

“You’re not tired already!”

Antonia had been out of bed now for days but the weather was wretched throughout the period and she had been forced to remain indoors, inactive.

Now with the sun riding more characteristically—

a jewel in the pacific Irish sky, and the grass and trees and emerald-green plants and blooms were beginning to transform the landscape, Antonia had ventured out at last, escorted this time by Dunstan.

Wildhearne (not that she expected *him* to walk with her across the rolling acres) was away on one of his mysterious missions upon which he vanished without warning, being here and then gone before you were aware that he was missing.

Quintin, too, lived a life that seemed both secretive and peaceful. It was books, Antonia thought, that kept Quintin from human companionship. She imagined him in his own apartments that smelled pleasantly of leather and old bindings and the aroma of print. She would have liked to visit Quintin there and have him exhibit his books to her appreciative eyes and perhaps explain to her some abstruse matter that his scholarship made accessible to him, but that others—like Antonia herself—would find uncomprehensible and even daunting.

On occasion her dreams included Quintin. Antonia saw him in her dreams as infinitely softer-looking, and less retiring, more willing to spend time with her than with the books that competed with everybody for his attention.

In her dreams she was aware that Quintin was shown as being different from the actuality that she daily confronted but it gave her pleasure to see his face light up in a smile at her appearance before him. They would have conversations then and Quintin would talk eagerly to her on subjects that he never made reference to during the occasions when they met across the table, or in the Hall where much of the life of the manor was conducted.

Antonia knew it not to be true, that the dream-like

Quintin was merely a wish that Quintin be as warm toward her and as accessible as Dunstan. She lived with intensity in her dreams and often, seeing Quintin's faintly-handsome, brooding features in the reality of Lislaughton, she found herself wondering why he did not refer to those talks together that they both had and which remained in her memory, although she was aware that they were as insubstantial as smoke.

Instead, now, Antonia was out walking with Dunstan. The boy had been genuinely thoughtful about her and appeared to understand that under certain optimum conditions she ought to get outdoors, so that the sunlight might perform its healing magic upon her.

And already she was feeling better. The soft, clear air, the clean scent of brush and grass, the anointing sun, and the fleecy, restless, animal-shaped clouds and sky banished from her (almost) the stubborn illness that had kept her in bed at Lislaughton.

Soon, now, she would be well enough again to return to Copsley, where Antonia would be babied and nursed by Lottie. Lottie, thought Antonia, would be glad to see her return. This caused a sadness in her, too.

For, of course, she would not be able to remain much longer at Copsley, either. It saddened Antonia because she would (she must) be leaving her friend, Lady Charlotte, to return to the fragmentary life Antonia had pursued after the deaths of her parents. And while she had grown attached to the grounds around Copsley, and to the odd house itself, it was truly Lislaughton she loved.

Antonia could dream herself as ecstatically enclosed within Lislaughton, its hospitable environs

and gracious park and comfortable, comforting rooms and cheerful Hall, with their memories and secrets, and ghostly ancestry, she saw herself as in a dream moving through the rooms and lightening it to pleasure, gaiety and laughter, Antonia saw it before her, in her eye, reverberating with the laughter she would bring to it; she would bring it warmth, and friendship and love.

She walked slowly in the wake of the bounding Dunstan. Dunstan had raced far in front of Antonia and she walked languidly—a little aimlessly—following at a distance, somewhat dreamily. She had dreamed much during her illness and convalescence. The dreams Antonia had lived in her sick-bed had given her a sense of peace and a feeling of security and even comfort.

After her initial attempt to shorten her convalescence, when Antonia had tried and failed to get out of bed, she had succumbed rather pleasantly, she now felt, to the sense of dreamy inertia that she experienced in those last days of her sickness.

She was at last, she thought, really, really well. She need no longer remain at Lislaughton; indeed, there was little to prevent her from returning to Dublin. In Dublin, she knew, the sense of Irish history and Irish destiny would strike her at once as more acute. And in Dublin Antonia would be in the middle of tumultuous events, fierce happenings, puzzling yet very dramatic and probably agonizing encounters.

Here, Antonia was thinking, in the country, with only the prosperous surrounding her in their manors, and enclosures of acres of park and field and lake like ancient fiefdoms, you were not exposed to the flaming issues that were set before the Irish in the blazing

type of newspaper and periodical, or the inflammatory oratory of those who thundered of revolution now, and bloody withdrawal from the tyrannical chains of perfidious England!

Oh, there were reverberations, too, right here! Antonia had been confronted by them, proving to her that now there was not a corner of the land where disturbances were not evident and often deadly.

Not for the first time and (though Antonia could not have foreseen it then) not, certainly, for the last time, Ireland was stirring fitfully, drawing together in gangs and formations and in organizations of every description (secret like the Defenders and their descendants The Hell Fires) and political, like the home-rule followers of Tone and Emmett) to make demands and oppose, with Irish blood if need be, the advances of British terrorism.

Terrorism and tyranny were too much for Antonia. There was no fanaticism in her nature. She did not feel tyrannized. If the English were evil and cruel, she had not suffered evil or cruelty at their hands. Antonia recalled the English of her childhood, the friends of her father (a passionate patriot) and her gentle mother. What tyranny could they be guilty of?

Antonia sighed. She was suddenly made aware that she was miles from the friendly features of her childhood—and miles and years away now, and her parents even further removed from her side than that.

It appeared that she was nearly miles from Dunstan, too, Antonia suddenly discovered. She was all alone here in an unfamiliar landscape. Lislaughton had been left far behind and was now wholly concealed behind a wood that itself was remote from the house. After Dunstan had raced on ahead, Antonia

had slowed her own movement to a walk. He would soon tire and stop for awhile to wait until she caught up, Antonia thought. It was of such little consequence to her that it hardly registered upon the barometer of her emotions. Dunstan would not slip off and leave her. He was even now somewhere behind a tree or a bush watching Antonia's lost, vague efforts, his hands covering his mouth so that his high, boyish laughter would not give his hiding-place away.

Antonia stopped and scanned the landscape before her and surrounding her. But she was all alone under the wide, gold-flecked sky. She felt closer to heaven out here, with the clouds heaped like lamb's wool, pile upon soft pile, and the sun like a shining coin overhead. She could speak to her mother, her father, and they would hear her, no matter the distance heaven was from the troubled earth.

"I'm sorry," Antonia faltered. It wasn't what she wanted or intended to say to them. What did she want to convey to her watching, vigilant, patient guardians? That she loved them, of course. That she wanted them back. That she could not be happy this way. That she had changed and that she was sorry she had. That Ireland had changed so much that the change threatened and frightened her. "What am I to do?" she asked of her father. She saw his thoughtful face clearly. It told her that he loved her but he couldn't tell her—or Ireland—what to do.

"Dunstan," Antonia called, suddenly. "Dunstan!"

The name was thrown back to her in an echo. "Dunstan! Dunstan!"

It must be *still* morning, Antonia concluded, reasonable, but she felt no longer calm. The weather

turned abruptly chill. Antonia was wearing a white dress of very fragile muslin that now seemed to her to be dangerously inadequate. She had brought nothing with her, a shawl or some covering in the event of a change in temperature. And so she was unprepared for the unexplained that developed around her now.

Rain would be disastrous for her, so soon after emerging from a sickroom. Were she to be caught in a downpour it would surely mean a relapse now, for her strength had not yet returned in full, and she had not the resistance to evade its consequences. Antonia began carefully to consider the possibilities.

It was clear that she could not remain here. There was no protection against the rain that was imminent. Should she get up and walk back to the house she would almost certainly be overtaken and probably drenched.

And it was growing steadily cooler. A chill penetrated her light dress, which yielded sensuously to the fine curves of her full, womanly figure. But it was not the dress for a day like this one, when the sun withdrew from above and the clouds blackened the low-hanging sky. No, "Dunstan!" she cried out.

Dunstan, came the voice, after a moment.
Dunstan!

Perhaps the boy had forgotten where he had left her and was looking for her even now. Antonia had gone on walking after Dunstan had run off, probably expecting that Antonia would pursue him. It may be that she had taken a different direction after he was out of sight. Antonia found herself being protective of the child. It was she, Antonia, who had been at fault. He was hardly more than a boy. *She* ought to have been looking after *him*.

Instead she had wandered in a dream through a landscape of softly rolling earth and concealing trees.

Antonia had never before been so far from the house, either at Copsley (except in a carriage) or at Lislaughton. It was entirely strange to her eyes, stranger to her than in the dreams Antonia had dreamed in her illness, when Quintin would appear in it, or Wildhearne would stalk through it, or Dunstan would lead her, as he had been leading her, through it to safety.

This safety now was threatened. She was not alarmed for herself—though she suddenly began to experience some of the symptoms (though in a milder form) that had sent her to bed. She was definitely feeling somewhat faint. She had walked for some distance beneath a full sun and a hot, bright, deceptive sky.

Antonia put her hand to her forehead. She wondered if her fever were returning. Perhaps she had made a mistake to come so far after having been out of bed for so short a time.

“Dunstan!” she called again, this time in so faint a voice that not even an echo sounded in return.

Antonia could not help it. She was forced to look for a place to rest herself. She sat down for a moment upon the raw trunk of a tree that had been cut down, and which lay there still fragrant with the natural scent that filled the nostrils more satisfying than the perfumes that the ladies coveted from France.

In a moment, Antonia told herself, I will get up and go looking for Dunstan. I cannot, she scolded herself, return to Lislaughton without him. But for awhile, anyway, she would be forced to rest herself here upon this newly-fallen tree, beneath its living companions and shrouded by them and feeling too weakened suddenly either to move forward or go back.

—XXXVI—

Antonia did not know how long she sat perched upon the rough bark of the sprawled tree. The sense of time had changed for her since her illness. From day to day she had not been conscious of the passage of hours. Only at the end of the day, when the dark crowded against the windows, and the room darkened and the light from the fire illuminated it, did Antonia realize that she had been sick for still one more morning, another afternoon, the onset of another evening. She would lie in her bed and her feelings would be like this. Just like this.

There would be a feeling of remoteness. Her pulses would slow and she would follow her heartbeats as though they were somebody else's. She would act like one drugged. She would emerge from what seemed to be a waking sleep into a rarefied calm.

Perhaps Dunstan would return and find her there. It might be wiser, Antonia thought, to remain in one place, since Dunstan would surely be looking for her, and she would be easier to discover if she had not wandered away, as she might.

And so Antonia sat there, where she could look out and see in several directions. But there was nobody to see, nothing before her eyes but the familiar, untroubled part of Ireland that was surely no more than a deception. Revolution had penetrated even these

peaceful dells and remote green vales. Somebody's skull would be opened, or a knife find its way between the visible ribs of one of the Defenders, or the enemy of the Defenders.

Insofar she was able to, Antonia sympathized deeply with the Irish who gave up their comfort to go out into the country—where life could be brutal and short—to fight the way the Indians had fought the American settlers—from tree to tree, and by night, and with primitive weapons. The club against the rifle. The knife against the bullet. The truth—the Defenders, The Hell Fires would say—against the enemy lie.

She did not want to think about it. It was confusing, and her sickness and her stay here at Lislaughton, had caused confusion enough to Antonia as it was. What could she—a mere girl—decide about something so complex as the relations between two nations, both speaking more or less the same language, though using identical words to mean something different to each?

No she would not think of it, Antonia decided. The sun—which was hot—appeared suddenly to lose its warmth and its peaceable light. A cloud descended upon it and shrouded it like a curtain. Suddenly it looked late, although it had been morning when Antonia had left the house with Dunstan. Antonia must not—she *could* not—remain where she was. She would have to rise and—if Dunstan was not to be found—look for shelter from the rising wind, the rain that may descend upon her in minutes.

But she did not like leaving Dunstan wandering over the empty terrain. Antonia got up from the tree-trunk slowly and with an effort. Once again she began to experience a weakness in her limbs and to

feel one more time the invasion of her senses by something powerful and insistent. It was the sickness, something in her head warned her. The sickness had not completely left her. It could come back and claim her again. This time, it seemed to threaten, it will be different. This time you won't get away.

—XXXVII—

Antonia tried following in the direction taken by Dunstan, in the expectation that she would meet the boy coming back to look for her. But he was not to be seen. Antonia forgot—as much as she was able—her own discomfort and threatened sickness. This is possible when you are more concerned about someone else, rather than with your own weakness.

For a moment Antonia was able to forget hers, as she was forced to, to concentrate upon the boy's. She closed her eyes and tried to remember, accurately, exactly the steps the child had taken away from where she had been—as Dunstan had joked—dreaming.

But it was a dream no longer. The sun died. The sky turned barren. A raw chill drove out the deceptive warmth that had enclosed her for awhile in its healing emissions. Antonia's brain was clear now. No longer could she accuse herself—or be accused—of dreaming. She was searching for a feckless lad who had taken her walking to divert her and who had wandered away exactly as the sun had vanished from above. Dunstan was young, even for his pitifully few years. He appeared fragile and wan and—as she was, she knew—endangered. Endangered by everything. By the deceitful elements, which promised one thing and then turned

threatful. By fate. By the Irish themselves, and their violent destiny.

We are all in danger, every one, Antonia thought, not thinking now of health or of herself, but of young Dunstan, Charlotte and even the maids and servants of the two houses of Copsley and Lislaughton. You were reminded of danger when you found yourself—as Antonia did—alone in the jade and emerald landscape. Jade and emerald. Emerald and jade—a sea of radiant green. Green, Antonia found herself thinking, was as much the color of danger as was red.

“Dunstan!” she cried out, now. “Dunstan?” But there was no answer from Dunstan, no reply from any human creature. Birds shrilled back at her. The insects showered a variety of sounds upon her as she passed. The leaves whistled over her head, disturbed by winds that shook the branches until they trembled. Some drops fell upon her cheek. A warning. In a minute—ten minutes—earlier, later—the storm would erupt and assault her mercilessly.

She must find shelter now—at once! Shortly it would be too late. There was not time enough to get back to Lislaughton to beat the downpour. There must be a place near to protect her from the storm that announced itself in a sky turned the color of night.

In front of her a group of trees were closely huddled, standing compactly, like some figures upright and come together for support. They did not offer much protection but there was little else visible before her or around her. Antonia was forced to hurry, although she had earlier supposed that she was moving as fast as she was able. Her limbs felt heavy from their long inaction and protested their pain at her

sudden movements, but she ignored their distress.

When Antonia came to the huddle of trees she saw that they were pathetic shelter for someone in danger of a drenching. Although they appeared to be standing close together they were actually separated and, standing among them, she saw that she was exposed here as anywhere out in the open.

Never had she felt so helpless. The only way anybody might be alarmed for her, and come to look for her, would be if Dunstan returned alone to the house, and it might be hours before the boy thought to do that. Probably he would remain out here—as Antonia had—and time would pass and it would be evening or later when Wildhearne or Quintin found out about her and came for her.

In spite of herself, Antonia shuttered. What would Wildhearne think of her? A silly girl, he would probably think her. Too flightily to look after her own safety. Just out of bed after a serious sickness and exposing herself this way in such unpredictable weather.

But what did she care whether Wildhearne thought her silly or not? Probably he thought little of her at all, except as an inconvenience that he was forced to endure.

Antonia thought of Quintin. He would take her part, she believed. Though she could not see Quintin in her mind's eye opposing his brother in her behalf. No, Quintin would be quiet about it—circumspect, as he was about all things—perhaps exhibiting a surface indifference until Wildhearne had left him, and then venturing out—no matter the discomfort or even danger—to find her wherever she was. In her heart Antonia felt herself to be comfortable with Quintin—or with this vision of Quintin as he appeared to her mind.

—XXXVIII—

Antonia had not been able to see it before from the angle from which she had been forced to approach toward it. Now it became—like a mirage—visible to her eyes—although she might as easily have missed it, low and half-hidden as it was by the circle of trees and the fact that it appeared to be built partly underground.

A peasant's hut—it seemed to be—jutting up from the ground, so that only the flat gray roof—like slate, or stone—met the eye, which could mistake it for part of the landscape, some natural product of the earth, like a tree or a rock.

Without hesitation, Antonia, moving very boldly, pointed toward the hut, thinking that whoever lived there—though there was no sign that the hut was occupied—would admit her, at least until the storm was spent.

She experienced nothing but relief at discovering it there behind the trees and high ground of the Irish land. She felt too weakened by her long walk, the exposure to the changing weather and her recent sickness to be surprised to come upon a hut so remote from other habitations.

For all Antonia knew the Lancing holdings contained numerous such small houses honeycombed all through the rest of the property. Simple Irish folk had

settled these places long years past. Huts and modest houses had been sturdily built by the serfs and lived in while their tenants had worked for the huge estates like Lislaughton and Copsley and the rest of the landowners. The serfs were all gone now, and even the peasants had grown prosperous enough at least to have abandoned the toy-sized huts. Irish families were bigger, and so were the demands they made. Land had to accompany the places they lived in. The tenants could no longer be contained in the tiny rooms that once were all their grandfathers and great-grandmothers ever knew.

Antonia was grateful to have come upon it, although she never doubted that shelter would offer itself somehow. It made her shudder to think of being excluded from the protection of a roof when a storm was manifestly blowing up, one that threatened her with a recurrence of the illness she had just lived through.

She walked quickly, picking her way tentatively over the stones and soft earth, studying the structure for some indications of occupancy. But there was only silence here, save for the occasional whistle or cry of a bird invisibly aloft in the branches, probably anticipating an unwanted wetting.

Antonia stood a few feet from the entrance, which looked forbidding, and bolted against entry. She was relieved that there was no one to whom she had to present herself, some stranger who might find her presence there suspicious. Antonia approached the door very tentatively. She had not the strength, she knew, to force the lock if it were secured against intruders, such as she acknowledged herself to be.

Should it be so, Antonia would be forced to remain outside what looked to be a dry shelter, while

rain—which had not yet begun to fall—threatened her with its pent-up force.

To her surprise, the door yielded noiselessly to her experimental, somewhat fearful, touch. It did not seem to her to be an unused entry, creaky with old age and rust. The door swung open readily, as though the premises were in daily use.

Antonia entered what would have been a kitchen and looked around. The floor was the hard, packed peat that the Irish had used in their houses in earlier centuries. The gloom within was very deep and there was nothing much to be seen in the room—a couple of rough benches, a table and a few utensils. An opening faced her as Antonia entered from outside, and she went toward it without stopping further to examine the room that she had come into.

A flight of steps made out of broad logs led up, and Antonia, holding her breath, crept up the slanting stairs, with the sound of her own footsteps her only accompaniment.

The room above, like the one below, held just a few sparse bits of inadequate furniture, although here there were several primitive chairs and a cot. There were no windows—the rear of the hut was no doubt flat up against the earth, half-concealing the house itself from view, until you were upon it, as had been the case with Antonia.

What a remarkable hideaway for someone, Antonia could not help thinking. Perhaps Dunstan knew of it—surely Dunstan *must* know of it—and probably used it when he went for his rambles, raiding birds' nests and doing the mischief that boy's fertile brain conceives of and sets into play. Her own tired brain seized upon Dunstan now and held out to Antonia a reprieve. She could remain here for

awhile—safely in out of the rain that was coming—having the possibility, even the likelihood, that Dunstan would come, Antonia comforted herself, and find her here and lead her back home. Home to Lislaughton. (She had never thought before of Lislaughton as home.)

A cot covered by an antique blanket attracted her attention. Though dusty, it was not dirty, and the mildewed smell that emanated from it was the familiar one of all such unaired premises, and Antonia did not find it forbidding or particularly unpleasant. She did not give much thought to this aspect of it, but threw herself down upon it with relief, grateful through and through her being for having so fortuitously stumbled upon it when she had not even been looking for four walls and a roof, but some crude shelter from a storm that had not yet materialized.

She had tired herself—her activities had—and she did not dwell upon the happy accident of her discovery. Now she huddled against the mattress and listened acutely for the sound of someone—Dunstan—approaching. There were tiny noises—a bird alighting heavily upon the roof, a stone dislodged by something rattling against the wood—but nothing human betrayed itself.

Listening, Antonia felt her eyes closing. Once she forced them open when she thought she heard the door being tried, and she even sat up. But a moment later she lay back, after having satisfied herself that no one but herself was present. Then—only about a minute after that—sleep overpowered her, and exactly as in the room back at Lislaughton during her sickness—her eyes closed in sleep and she dreamed, wishfully.

—XXXIX—

Through her dream the sound of a door opening and closing startled her into wakefulness. A scraping of feet and a clearing of throats. Antonia sat up and listened, completely conscious now. There was more, then, than one person in the hut with her. Her heart beat faster. It was certain that strangers— whoever they were—represented a threat to her, even a danger. Although she was no great distance from Lislaughton, this dwarfish room and this primitive hut seemed to be a century removed from it.

The door slammed and she thought that the newcomers had left at once. Then she heard footsteps mounting the stairs. *He was coming* toward her. He would discover her there, lying on the cot, trembling. Her throat grew dry and she felt feverish. Perhaps she was undergoing the relapse she had feared.

Antonia could hear the raspy breathing of the man—if it was a man's heavy step, as it surely sounded to be—as he ascended the short stairway. Antonia inhaled deeply, attempting fearfully to prepare herself for an encounter with this frightening intruder.

She lay inert, hugging the cot, her mouth against the musty blanket, listening gravely and intently to her own heart. The man himself, ascending, appeared to be in no hurry to betray his presence. What

had become of his companion? Why had they separated? It may be that the stranger knew of the cot and merely wanted to rest for a time while his partner was away on some errand.

She heard his breathing so close that it might have been her own. His presence was so near that Antonia had to stifle the scream that fought in her throat for release. No one would hear her. She could scream with all the strength that was left in her, that had not yet been sapped from her, but who was there to heed it or come to her rescue? What would they do to her? Were they the the outlaws who had terrorized the big houses and their rich sporting owners? There was only one now, but he was not alone, she knew that. They traveled in groups, relentlessly riding from county to county, where they would strike swiftly and usually successfully, then vanish, leaving behind not even a description.

Suddenly the door opened in the room below and Antonia heard a voice that her ear found bafflingly (to her) familiar. "What the hell're you doin' up there—?"

The answer came from very near to where Antonia clung to the cot. "I thought you'd be longer—"

The one who had just come in uttered an oath. "We're late as it is."

"Sure . . . we can make our own time now. *we?*"

Again the new arrival erupted in an oath. "This is damned serious. You sound's though we had nothin' *but* time."

Thank heaven, she breathed. Antonia put both hands against her breasts, feeling her heart pounding painfully against them. The man outside her room had stopped or been halted by the entrance of

partner. He appeared now to have turned back and started to descend again into the room below. "You're overwrought. You've been overwrought ever since—"

There was a shattering oath. "You had as much to do with it as I did!"

The man who had been on the stairway outside her room could be heard distinctly, although his manner, Antonia observed, was graver and more gentle. He seemed familiar, too, to her, along with the one who had just re-entered. Somewhere Antonia had encountered these voices before, in circumstances which had quickened the pace of her heart, as now. "Who pulled the trigger?" he demanded; he still spoke quietly, with the same gentle un insistence. "Who arranged the—"

But he was brutally cut off by the other man. "Are you accusing me?" he shouted.

His partner did not raise his voice. (In that instant Antonia recognized it. His was the voice and manner of one of the two highwaymen who held up their carriage when Antonia and Lady Charlotte had been riding to Lislaughton.

She remembered the tones of the other man even more vividly. He had been closer, she had seen as well as heard him, though he had been in the saddle and masked, and she had been down on the ground.)

"Let up, Ben," he said, as if trying to humor his friend. "Whatever you done, you know I'll never reveal it.—"

"Don't use my name, you goddam fool," Ben exclaimed. "Oh, what an idiot they've given me to work with. For the love of God, man, if you ever use my name again," he shouted, "I'll—"

"You're only overwrought. Maybe what you'd

best do—”

“Are you presuming to tell *me* what I ought to do?” the man, Ben, demanded.

“Maybe it would be wise to separate. It probably would be wise if we worked alone or with somebody else. After what happened.”

“Are you losin’ your nerve?” his partner said, a jeer in his tone.

But it did not cause the other to lose his temper or alter the timbre of his voice. “You know the answer to that one,” he defended himself.

“You’re anxious enough to lay all the blame on me,” the other said. “As though you wasn’t there. As though you was only along for an airin’.”

“I would never have done what you done,” Ben’s partner repeated, almost wearily. “You know it. I know it. The world knows it—at least anybody that knows Tim Costello knows it.”

“That’s right. Tell the world both our names.”

“They’ll come lookin’ for us both now, after what’s been done. I didn’t join up to be a party to a murder.”

Murder! Fear numbed Antonia, listening to the two highwaymen in the room just below where she lay huddled. There was no doubt at all in her mind that this Ben and Tim Costello were the members of the Hell Fire band who had attacked Charlotte’s carriage to rob her, to rob them both.

But murder!

Antonia dared not breathe now, lest it be overheard by the vindictive-sounding Ben, and bring him raging and threatening into the room. She was trapped in an abandoned hut miles from everywhere with a murderer who seemed—to her ears—capable of killing again. He sounded as though he could easily raise

weapon and shoot the man down who had just been riding with him on their dangerous mission. It may have occurred to that gentleman, himself.

"Now, Ben," he temporised. "It's ove an' done. It could have been anyone. It's not the first that's got a bullet in his back."

"Will you stop talkin' about it?" the other said, furiously.

"You need a drink."

"You'll put me an' all of us in danger, usin' our right names th' way you do. I've warned you an' I've warned you.-"

"There's nobody to hear us,-is there, Ben?"

And—by way of answer—the door opened and the two men were joined by an indeterminate number of others. It was impossible for Antonia to count them. There was a mix of voices—greetings, exclamations, a few cheerful oaths—all rising to the floor above where Antonia lay, overhearing it.

"Where *is* he?" another—a new—voice inquired.

"He'll be here, all right."

"*He's* late."

"You tell him that," the highwayman, Ben, jeered.

"What's the matter with *you*?" the other man wanted to know.

"There's not a god damn thing wrong. Why?" Ben's angry voice shouted. "Who the hell says there is?"

"No one, Ben, the new voice said, placatingly. "Nobody at all says there is."

"I've told yuh an' told yuh," Ben's wrathful tones asserted, "not to call me by my right name. It'll mean trouble if you do it one more time in public."

"He's right. We ought to use aliases," another

agreed. "It's dangerous—an' you can't ever know who's overhearin' an' remeberin'."

His words were greeted with noisy laughter and some jeering, as though he made a joke that barely succeeded. "I'm serious," he protested, but he was barely audible amid the loud responses.

At least they weren't quarrelling. And no one had suggested searching the hut. Apparently they were used to coming together here, for whatever purpose. This was the meeting place of the Hell Fire band—the secessionist group that had withdrawn from the Defenders in order to use methods of their own. Murder! Antonia thought, murder was one of these methods. Irishmen murdering Irishmen. It had been prophesied, she'd heard, long ago.

Long ago in an age buried now in the Irish mists. An Irishman to raise a bloody hand to a brother Irishman. It had begun! When would it stop? How could it be stopped? Who was there to stop it?

There was a silence in the room below. It filled the space, the rooms, the hut. It continued for so long—so long to the ears of the girl on the cot—that she thought after moments that the men must have withdrawn at a quiet signal from one of them. That they had moved silently across the floor and out into the daylight. Antonia had lost the thread of time in her anxiety and discomfort but she thought that it must still be daylight, that it could not be more than early afternoon.

She started to rise, to go to the doorway and look down into the room, inviting the danger of being discovered. At that moment, though, there was the noise of the door being flung open and left that way. Someone else had come in. Antonia was able to detect this from the murmur that greeted the door's

being suddenly opened—those already inside spoke not a word of greeting or other exchange—but there were some throat-clearings and various audible effects of the unexpected entrance.

Antonia waited, listening intently, for the sound of the voice of whoever it was who had just entered for some clue to his appearance, some evidence of his identity. She herself remained as silently rigid as the cot that contained her chilled body, even her breath releasing itself stealthily, so as not to betray her presence. Finally the man spoke. A thrill shot all through her the instant she heard his voice.

“Carney is dead!”

The man, Ben, was the first to reply. “He shouldn’t have tried to take my gun from me. I wouldn’t have killed him. I had nothin’ agin’ Carney—even if he does work for the British.”

“Do you know what this means?”

Ben’s partner, Tim Costello, spoke now. “That’s right, sir. Ben never meant to pull the trigger, sir. I was along with him, sir. It was him or Captain Carney—he must’ve found out, an’ followed us here. Ben never meant to, sir. I swear it! I swear it on the soul of—”

“Spare me your oaths and saints. You’ve all taken oaths. There was to be no bloodshed—no Irishmen killed. We were not to be like the bloody French with the axes used upon their own.”

From the moment Antonia heard the voice, from the first sound and the words that came tumbling into the room beneath her, a thrill went all through her. She wanted to rise from the cot and go rushing down the timbered steps to where the voice came from. It had been in her thoughts, in her heart. It had often been in her dreams.

Wildhearne.

Wildhearne Lancing!

And Wildhearne was *was talking to these outlaws*—these conspirators—about the death of Captain Carney. Although Wildhearne had spoken the words that had struck anguish in her heart, Antonia could not credit it. Captain Carney would not let himself be killed. God would never allow it. Ireland would never allow it. He was somewhere now in the county riding his horde and protecting the lives and the property of all those dependent upon his bravery and his authority. How could Charles Carney be dead? He was *needed*.

Wildhearne—it *was* Wildhearne—was continuing.

“I ought to have known—my reason warned me and I might have listened—the Irish cannot be disciplined—they cannot be trusted—they’re too headlong, it’s been said of you—perhaps rightly—I did not believe the best evidence—I did not believe it when I learned that Carney had been shot.”

(Captain Carney dead! Wildhearne had uttered the dread words again. Again she would not, could not, credit it.)

“He was killed accidentally,” Ben maintained, sullenly. His voice sounded uncertain in the silence that swallowed his words. The silence must have disturbed and distressed him. “You men know that I wouldn’t kill, less I had to,” Ben appealed, in a tone different from the one he had used against Tim Costello and the other man earlier. Still, no man supported him and he did not pursue it. Not even Tim Costello’s voice was raised in his defense.

“Carney is dead! Isn’t that evidence enough? What more is there to hear? An accident. Life is an

accident. And death is as much an accident, no matter where or when it happens. So that is no excuse. Do you know what will happen now? Do you comprehend what you have done? You have set the dogs loose. You and your callousness and carelessness. Oh, call it what you like. Call it bad luck, which is what all your kind take refuge in. It was bad luck for Carney to be on your trail. And it was bad luck for you that Carney overtook you. You and your bad luck and your bad actions. I was skeptical about you from the beginning. You have a bad—an evil—temper—and I ought to have kept you out of this movement. Our cause was based on idealism. We were the Defenders. We were to defend Ireland, in her need. Others may shed blood. We were there to staunch Ireland's wounds. Ireland has bled enough. Now, Now—'

Wildhearne's voice faltered. Each word stabbed Antonia's heart. How had he been able to feel like this, think like this, speak like this (if only to himself, in his secret thoughts) lead such men in dangers that resulted in deaths by violence—like Captain Carney—how had he been able to idealize Ireland (as Antonia herself did) without betraying evidence of it to those who knew him best? Her head was too full to reason clearly about the scene she was a stealthy witness to.

"Now," Wildhearne continued, after a pause, "we come to the purpose of the meeting today. I have not the heart for it, my friends—my dear friends. We have ridden together. Plotted. Yes, yes, plotted together—we were forced to—events forced us to—Ireland forced us to—Ireland forced us from a secret society into a sacred cause. I would prefer to have been known as a Defender. We were *all* defen-

ders. That was the purpose of our cause. Now—with the death of Captain Carney—a man I respected; a decent man, a courageous soldier, an Irish gentleman who was as at home at Lislaughton as I am, a man whose respect would have honored me, had I enjoyed it—now with his death I am called upon to make a decision that I can either delay or announce to you here.

“I have chosen not to delay. And I shall not prolong what I have to tell you. You are free—free to do what you please—ride with the Defenders—continue with the Hell Fire band—or return to your wives and families. The murder of one Irishman has allowed me no compromise. This is the oath we all swore. It is as much the cause as the cause itself. For me—the cause is ended. I shall not lead you again. You may find someone who will. That is your privilege. For myself, I return once again to Lislaughton, to my family, to my interrupted life—and to the woman I love as life itself, though her heart may belong to the man you murdered. I leave you now to make your own decision. Whatever you decide will no longer affect me. Let the record show that I withdraw. May you find your way without me.”

—XL—

Antonia lay stunned in the chill darkness of the secret room. She thought of this as the secret room, where she could listen and overhear life as it passed in review below her. What revelations life was prepared to make to you, if only you did nothing but listen. Captain Carney dead! Wildhearne Lancing Lancing the Defender, and leader of the Hell Fire band. Wildhearne declaring his love. 'The woman I love as life itself!'

Herself that woman, Antonia lay on the cot and almost forgot where she was. Wildhearne had gone. As soon as he had completed his speech he had—as he promised—withdrawn. Antonia would be in danger, she knew, should she be discovered here now. Who knew what mood the band would be in following Wildhearne's assault upon them?

Ben, the murderer, was still among them. He had been responsible for the death of Captain Carney. He had been the one (with his accomplice, Tim Costello) who had held up Charlotte and herself on the very night they had been expected at Lislaughton. A dangerous man, contemptuous of rules. That was the man she feared, whose silence below had the quality of animal cunning. Its strategic silence may involve treachery, the sudden spring, the teeth at the throat, the knife or the bullet in the back.

Following Wildhearne's departure, the men—the men of the Hell Fire band, as Antonia had learned—conversed in low tones among themselves. There was a confusion of words and exclamations, so that Antonia was unable to apprehend any of it. The rowdy Ben—noisier than the others and immediately identifiable—contributed several oaths that that he had already made familiar to Antonia's ears—and, very possibly, the ears of his political companions. Silence would fall intermittently, during which time Antonia wondered what the men were doing or thinking, having lost their leader and no doubt with the fact of murder weighing heavily and anxiously upon them.

She heard the door open and close. Antonia deduced from this that the men of the Hell Fire designation were separately or in pairs or in groups taking leave of each other, to go their own ways, singly, perhaps, or teamed up.

They did not leave together. It was understandable that they did not. Surely they would have been discovered if they had arrived or departed as a band. Of course, they might regard themselves as relatively safe on land that adjoined Wildhearne's acres, if he did not actually possess them himself.

Antonia wondered, pityingly, how Captain Carney had come upon Ben and the one called Tim Costello. It chilled her to think about Captain Carney's death—his murder, Wildhearne had characterized it. It numbed her and shook her profoundly and disagreeably. Had he merely stumbled upon them, or had he been on their track and attempting to overtake them when he received the fatal bullet?

Antonia was thinking about this when she became aware of the unnatural silence now below. Could she

be certain that the men had all gone: The door had opened and closed creakingly at intervals and then it had ceased. However, suppose they had left one of the company behind—a sentry? How was she to learn if they had without betraying herself?

The only method open to her was to steal from the safety of this isolated room to look down into the one below. But that way she might invite discovery. She did not feel strong enough or competent enough to undertake such a task. Instead, Antonia lay where she was, suffering from the revelation of Captain Carney's death and all but unstrung by what she had learned from Wildhearne's lips. 'The woman I love.' *She* was! *She* was the woman Wildhearne loved. Hadn't he said so? With Antonia, herself, listening? Yet how could he have known about that? And how could she believe him? And how was she to go to him?

Whatever protection his leadership might have afforded would no longer be available, since the men now were little better than a gang, with no one to curb them, and without the cause that they served to restrict them from the savage impulses which all gangs are subject to. She could wait, Antonia supposed, for someone from the house to come for her—Dunstan would surely have returned by now, and certainly there would be an alarm about her. Dunstan must know of this strange little shelter and himself be very likely to investigate it before giving up and going back to the house. She need just lie there and wait to be retrieved, like some object of worth that had carelessly been mislaid. Quintin or Dunstan or—or—or—*Wildhearne*—Wildhearne himself, bearing his love, might descend upon her and rescue Antonia from this.

In the end, being a woman, and having a courage that she could not admit to, she did get up from the cot and crossed the floor silently to the threshold. She took a breath and advanced stealthily toward the landing, overhearing a noisy breathing in the house that meant it was occupied.

Antonia held back, imagining upon the other side of the door one of the band—Ben, perhaps. It was he most of all that she feared. The other—Tim Costello—had revealed himself on both occasions that Antonia had encountered him to be a gentle man, it may even be a gentleman, a gentle Irish man whom she might entrust herself to. Somewhat daringly, now, though holding her breath, she let herself out onto the landing.

—XLI—

Afterward—after the whole frightening—frightful—day was behind her, Antonia was able to reconstruct with Wildhearne the sequence of events which led him back to her.

She did not want to think about it, re-live it, or even talk about it. About her heart-stopping moment on the staircase landing when Antonia looked below into the room that had been filled with desperate, agitated men and which she discovered now to be dark and—she almost fainted when confronted with it—empty.

Antonia had sat down upon one of the steps and inhaled deeply. Like Wildhearne, she was free—free as he had made himself, free of the cause that he had passionately embraced, free of the responsibility for acts not his own. What was she to do with this new, beautiful freedom? And if the heart is not free, can it be said that we know true freedom?

Antonia's girl heart was no longer—alone in the hut she was forced to submit to it—free; perhaps it had never been. There must always have been a time—during her siege of illness, when Antonia had been too weak to be analytical—when it had pounded an extra beat for Wildhearne.

But neither she nor her heart would have acknowledged its captive condition. It had actually been full

of guile toward her. It had misled her, and deceived her. It had fastened itself upon Quintin. It had transformed poor Captain Carney. It would not admit Wildhearne, although he alone, perhaps, had attempted to storm it. Still, it held fast and would not allow her to submit.

She did not tell all this at once to Wildhearne. In the first place, when he came upon her in his carriage, and lifted her tenderly from the down, and chafed her wrists (with love, with love) to bring back the circulation, and lay her back in the seat and used his handkerchief on her tears and the earth-streaks on her cheek, and spoke gently to her, and held her in his arms and begged her not to lose consciousness, Antonia had been too agitated to remember all that had happened and that was still happening around her.

She pressed trembling against him, forgetting all in a moment whatever it was that Irish maidens were to do or were not to do when alone with the Irish male. She pressed herself to him because he was wearing a cloak and she had nothing on over her dress, because she was feeling helpless and required his strength, because she *was* a maiden and he was a virile man and an Irishman, and because it was the only sane thing to do in these circumstances, whatever your nation or your faith.

Yet that did not prevent her from sobbing. She had reasons to. "Captain Carney!" Antonia said, with tears in her eyes. "It must have been terrible."

"You are not to think of that, my darling."

"I must!" Because she was happy. She was forced to recoil from such happiness.

"He was a brave man," Wildhearne said. "Brave men expect to die, especially when they are soldiers."

"It needn't have happened," she said.

"Don't think about it," he told her.

"When I think about him he is alive and gentle and smiling—as I knew him. I cannot picture him dead."

"Keep him alive then in your mind," Wildhearne said. He had been all alone in his carriage and driven it back along the grounds until he had come upon a white-clad, tragic figure coming toward him like some wild spirit among the elements.

He had leapt from his carriage and caught her in his arms. She was speaking in a delirium, he thought, she must be undergoing a relapse, Wildhearne was thinking. He regretted that the doctor was hours away and could not be returned to Lislaughton before tomorrow.

In the carriage she had become calmer at once. He had warmed her chilled body and taken control, as he had the right to—she surrendered to him that right. He may not have suspected it—how could he have known it—but he had already spoken his love to her? 'The woman I love.' It was in her brain. It echoed and re-echoed in her heart. It would inhabit her dreams.

"Dearest Antonia—darling Tony."

"You like to say that."

"Do you like to hear it?"

"I love to hear it."

"And you don't want me to say Miss Desmond?"

"I shan't answer to it," she told him.

"Darling Tony."

"The woman you love."

"Yes, The woman I—." Antonia looked up. Wildhearne looked down. Wildhearne read in the clear depths of her eyes that his secret was hers. That it was shared now. And that it would never be made known.

"I must have known," I said. "I ought to have sensed that you were there."

"I ought to have known that you—were who you were," Antonia told him. "Who else *could* it have been. Only someone," she said, "gallant and brave and—and Irish—like you. And idealistic, like you. And unselfish, Wildhearne, as you are. And—and able to lead men like—like those men." In spite of herself she shivered at the thought. "I'm sorry," she said. "They frighten me."

"You needn't be frightened now."

"I'm not frightened for me," Antonia said. "I am frightened for Ireland."

He did what a man is called on to do when confronted by a girl's fears. He kissed them away, as he had earlier banished the tears from her eyes. She sighed, but returned his kisses. This is an exercise that can be prolonged and sustained over a considerable length of time. To accomplish it, the carriage had to be stopped so that Wildhearne might devote himself to a task far more transcendent than guiding a horse in harness.

It was Dunstan coming back from the house who came upon them like that. Although, fortunately, they were not in each other's arms. Dunstan, however, would have been too joyous to notice. He had been looking and now he had found her, at last. He was able heroically to overlook that it had been Wildhearne who discovered her. When you stopped to think of it—as Dunstan certainly did—wasn't it Dunstan who could be credited with such desirable results?

But what about Ireland now? Wildhearne has cut himself off from the troubles of Ireland. Do they end

there? Does one brave man's desertion influence the story of a nation? The Defenders and their off-shoot the Hell Fire band vanished into the darkness; that is the condition in which they always worked. Darkness was the hell that claimed them.—a darkness without the fires that make hell intolerable. The Irish crept back to their huts and their holdings, relinquishing the freedom that they had fought for like desperate men. Like cornered men. Like men with an ideal, which was like a man in love. Like rejected lovers, they slipped away and left the field to their old enemy. Guns were the victors. Force was the winner. In the end.

But it was not the end, nor could it be. Alone with his heart and his spirit, the brave man resolves to demonstrate more courage. There will be more men. There will be more guns. There will be more money, taken from those who do not like to give it up. And in the end—

No, it did not end for Ireland that day in 1778. No more than it had ended a century earlier. Nor was it to end—for the Irish—a century later, when it all started over again. When the old wound broke open and it started bleeding again.

And what about Lady Charlotte? And Quintin Lancing, Wildhearne's And young Dunstan?

Lady Charlotte—Lottie—still loved and joyously cherished her adored Tony. Wildhearne was included in this. Lady Charlotte threatened to move to England, so much did she hold Copsley in distaste. Events happily resolved themselves for her. Wildhearne and Antonia left Lislaughton—after a delirious honeymoon there that lasted much of the year—to move to Dublin, that quiet, graceful city where civilization had left its stamp before expiring else-

where. Lady Charlotte occupied Lislaughton and her long life warmed it and kept it warm for the visits of Wildhearne and Antonia—and the young newcomers to the Lancing family.

Quintin departed for America abruptly. Communications between the two countries were intermittent. The Napoleonic wars cut off the mail entirely for awhile, and so the Lancings are several years behind what actually transpired for Wildhearne's brother, and Antonia's brother-in-law. In the early correspondence—which was succeeded by nothing but silence—he had gone into real estate in New England, and was expecting, he said, to realize a great deal of American money.

As for Dunstan, alas, he grew up. It is the fate all of us have to encounter and one day overcome.



*LOVE AND INTRIGUE AMID
GRAND COUNTRY HOUSES,
LUSTY FOX HUNTS, AND
GLITTERING CASINOS!*



Wildhearne Lancing, son of an aristocratic old Irish family, saw his country humbled by oppressive British rule. While society knew him as a charming rake, Lancing had another identity—the leader of the patriotic Defenders, pledged to drive the English out of Ireland.

Proud and beautiful Antonia Desmond was more than a match for the handsome Lancing. United by their hatred of the British, they lived on the edge of peril and loved with a passion as intense as their fight for freedom.

Into their lives rode the British officer, Captain Charles Carney, determined to destroy the Defenders—and coming dangerously close to doing just that . . .